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SANTA CRUZ

**ARCHIVING DISASTER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 AND HURRICANE KATRINA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS

with emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES and LATIN AMERICAN
AND LATINO STUDIES

by

Courtney J. Rivard

March 2012

The Dissertation of Courtney J. Rivard
is approved:

Professor Kent Eaton, Co- Chair

Professor Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Co-Chair

Professor Angela Davis

Professor Ronnie Lipschutz

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Table of Contents

<i>Table of Illustrations</i>	v
<i>Abstract</i>	vi
<i>Dedication</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Introduction: Preserving the Present for the Past</i>	1
Ethnography of the Archives.....	8
Theories of Memory.....	12
Comparing Disaster.....	16
September 11, 2001: Interpreting Shock.....	19
September 11 th Disaster Collections	27
Hurricane Katrina: Racialized Frames and Scenarios.....	30
Hurricane Katrina Disaster Collecting	37
Conclusion.....	39
Chapter Outline	40
<i>Chapter Two: Archival Power and the Nation-State</i>	48
Introduction:	48
The Origins of Archives and Museums.....	49
Civilizing Subjects through National Memories.....	54
Archival Construction and the Power to “Impose the Law”	63
The Power of Archival Procedures	71
Digitizing Archives	78
Conclusion.....	82
<i>Chapter Three: Collecting Disaster: The National Museum of American History and September 11, 2001</i>	84
Introduction	84
Origins of the Smithsonian.....	86
Acquisition Files: Access and Organization	91
Collecting “History-in-the-Making”	97
Focusing on Loss, Destruction, and Heroism	109

Conclusion.....	128
Chapter Four: A Second Disaster Collection - Hurricane Katrina.....	130
Introduction:	130
Access and Organization.....	131
The Hurricane Katrina Collection’s ‘Ethnic Scope’	133
Photography: “Capturing” Disaster Context.....	136
Objects of Disaster	140
The Power to Collect.....	156
Conclusion.....	158
Chapter Five: Archive of the Future: The September 11 Digital Archive	162
Introduction	162
Origins of the Digital Archives	163
Collection Efforts and Institutional Directions	172
The September 11 Digital Archive’s Virtual Organization	178
National Belonging and Individual Submissions.....	188
Conclusion.....	199
Chapter Six: Collecting Instant History: The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank .	201
Introduction	201
Constructing a “Memory Bank”	203
Continuing Digital Disaster Collection Methods	207
The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank’s Structure: Innovations and Limitations..	212
Framing Different Outcomes	218
Conclusion.....	231
Conclusion: ‘Recognizing’ the Power of Archives.....	233
Introduction	233
Proving Existence: The Pointe-au-Chien’s and BCCM’s Case for Federal Recognition	239
Bibliography.....	254

Table of Illustrations

Image 1: Window Washer Squeegee Handle.....111

Image 2: Wallet Recovered from World Trade Center.....121

Image 3: Firefighter’s Pry Bar.....125

Image 4: Banner from Overland Park, Kansas.....127

Image 5: Calculator recovered from the debris of the World Trade Center.....137

Image 6: This mailbox was all that remained of a home in New Orleans’s Lower
Ninth Ward.....139

Image 7: Mr. Francisco Zuñiga wearing his back brace.....143

Image 8: Vietnamese immigrant shrimper Sang Nguyen and his shrimp boat Miss
Brittany.....146

Image 9: The Sign on Rouen Street, with LeBeouf Family.....150

Image 10: Mert In NY2.....168

Image11: NEWYORK MIN-3.....168

Image 12: September 11 Digital Archive Homepage.....179

Image 13: September 11 Digital Archive Browse Page.....180

Image 14: September 11 Digital Archive Research Page.....181

Image 15: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Homepage.....213

Image 16: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Browse Page.....214

Image 17: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Browse Images Page.....215

Abstract

Courtney J. Rivard

*Archiving Disaster: A Comparative Study of September 11, 2001
and Hurricane Katrina*

The first decade of the 21st Century in the United States witnessed two major events that have come to be understood as national disasters: September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. Numerous historical institutions quickly mobilized to collect material relating to the two events, prompting the creation of what is now referred to as “disaster archives.” Such “disaster archives” turn a number of key tenets in the archival field on their head as they (1) immediately collect material instead of allowing substantial time to pass, (2) collect material that is in a destroyed state rather than in pristine condition, and (3) digitally collect thousands of anonymous online public responses to the two events instead of relying on experts and/or legitimate and verifiable sources. These new collection methods reveal the mechanisms of power involved in the construction of notions of race, sexuality, class, and national belonging through archival production.

This dissertation analyzes the birth and implementation of these new disaster archives by tracking the development of the first two instances of disaster archiving in the United States at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History’s September 11th and Hurricane Katrina Collections, together with their partnered digital archives: the September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory

Bank. Through the investigation of each archive's acquisition files, which document the merits of collecting each acquired item, coupled with interviews with key archival staff, this dissertation creates an innovative methodology – an ethnography of archives – that analyzes the complex structures of power involved in the process of archival creation.

This analysis demonstrates the ways in which racialized thinking subtly, yet powerfully informs the collection process of these disaster archives, resulting in two very different renderings of national belonging. Principles of whiteness are employed to render the September 11th victims heroic citizens, whose deaths deserve national mourning, whereas notions of Blackness, poverty, disposability, and criminality are activated to disassociate the victims of Hurricane Katrina from US national identity, granting them only distant sympathy. Such results have powerful consequences as these archives become the source of the past for future generations.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved life partner, Thomas, and our beautiful son, Robby. I never knew such profound love until you two boys came into my life. Without your constant support and encouragement, Thomas, this project would never have been completed. And it is from you, my dear Robby that I draw strength, inspiration, and hope for the future.

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I also want to thank my writing group (Sandra, Nick, Jin, Jen, Trevor, and Jasmine) that emerged from Angela's course on race and ethnicity. You all provided me with the supportive space to begin to flesh out all my many ideas that were often murky. I extend my deepest gratitude to my 'team grad school' mates – Sandra and Jenny – who were constant sources of strength and encouragement. I also must thank my mother, sisters, and Grandfather for giving me constant love and encouragement, and especially to Kristy for reading and editing my draft.

Additionally, I would like to thank the Politics Department and Historic New Orleans Collection who provided me with much needed research funds. Moreover, I am grateful for the help and access to information granted to me by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, September 11 Digital Archive, Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, Louisiana State Museum, and New York State Museum. I am

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I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to, Chief Naquin, Chairman Verdin, and Patty Ferguson for allowing me the opportunity to learn about the extremely important work of your two tribes. You all have helped me understand the true power of archives, and the extensive work necessary to deconstructing its claims to neutrality.

Introduction: Preserving the Present for the Past

The first decade of the 21st Century in the United States witnessed two major events that have come to be understood as national disasters: September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. As disasters of monumental proportion, the two events produced ruptures in the everyday proceedings of the United States, which served to unsettle many of the assumptions held so dear to the heart of the nation-state. While there were many different responses to these two moments of rupture, an interesting phenomenon surfaced within mere days of the two respective events – the call to remember. This call rang out loud and clear as numerous historical institutions¹ quickly mobilized to collect material relating to the two events, prompting the creation of what is now referred to as “disaster collecting.” Not only does this new collection method turn a number of key tenets in the field of historical preservation on its head, but it also reveals the interworking of power at the heart of the production of the nation-state and its corresponding national subjects.

Disaster collecting, as a new and unique collection method for archives and museums, was born in the days after September 11, 2001 as those within the field of historical preservation believed that they were witnessing a unique and monumental event in U.S. history. A collaboration of historical institutions in both New York City and Washington, D.C., including the Smithsonian, the New York Historical Society,

¹ Some of these institutions include the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, the New York Historical Society, the New York State Museum, New York City Fire Museum, and the Museum of the City of New York, the Louisiana State Museum, and the Historical New Orleans Collection.

and the George Mason Center for History and New Media among others, came together to discuss how they would collect materials. While each institution ultimately decided that they would collect material separately, they did agree that the events of September 11th necessitated a different type of collection that hinged on collecting materials immediately instead of allowing substantial time to pass to create a sense of distance and objectivity, which had been the established norm within the field. As one curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History explains,

As historians we normally have a period of reflection when we evaluate what's happening. We're not really involved in current events - it's rather contradictory to what historians do. Usually some time elapses before we can evaluate and determine what's to be brought into a collection. So in that sense the immediacy of this situation is quite unusual. It does feel different. There is a kind of rush to make sure that we actually do capture and acquire what we need to before it's either destroyed or disappears."²

This sense of immediacy was due to the fact that the objects deemed historically worthy were the same objects that were marked for immediate clean-up and removal in efforts to recover from the destruction and return the cities to their everyday functions.

The condition of these historically worthy objects also represented a break with established norms. Normally, objects are collected in pristine condition and great efforts are made to keep them in that state throughout time; however, because these historical institutions desired objects that embodied disaster, the objects were collected in a destroyed state, often covered in dust. Collecting destroyed and

² <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/transcript.asp?ID=36>. Accessed 1/15/12

contaminated objects presented a host of new issues in the field of preservation, which is discussed in chapters three and four. Lastly, because the shock generated by the events on September 11th was thought to impact the entire nation, many of these institutions wanted a way to capture the general public's response and reaction. As the 21st Century is a distinctly digital age, many turned to the Internet as both a site for the collection of materials and a technology to capture and store the material. Therefore, these three elements (immediate collection, the collection of material in a destroyed state, and the digital collection of digital contributions from the general public) constitute the main characteristics of the new method of disaster collecting. Moreover, it is precisely these unique elements of disaster collecting that demonstrate the complex and interconnected roles that archives, media, and affect play in constructing, often unequal, notions of national belonging.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH) quickly emerged as the leading institution in the disaster collecting effort due in large part to its status as a federal trust, which expedited the collection process as it was able to more easily cut through bureaucratic red tape. The NMAH also partnered with George Mason's Center for History and New Media (CHNM), which began the September 11 Digital Archive dedicated to digitally capturing digital materials relating to the public's reaction to the events. The joint efforts of the NMAH and CHNM proved quite successful as they received considerable acclaim for their

collections and exhibitions.³ Their success coupled with the new-found importance of disaster collecting led both institutions to again partner and employ similar methods in order to collect materials relating to the second major U.S. disaster in the decade – Hurricane Katrina. Because the NMAH and the CHNM emerged as leading, partnered institutions in physical and digital realms, respectively, along with the fact that both have collections relating to September 11th and Hurricane Katrina, this dissertation centers the two institutions in its analysis.

While archives have often been popularly figured as neutral repositories of past materials where scholars can investigate materials in order to develop objective accounts of the past, many critical scholars have revealed the distinct power involved in collecting, appraising, cataloguing, organizing, and interpreting archives.⁴ Though the theoretical underpinnings of these relations of power within archives have been explored in relation to archives of the distant past, few have been afforded the opportunity to track the development of the archive as it occurs. This project seizes this opportunity to analyze the birth and implementation of these new disaster archives as they establish new norms within the field. Moreover, this study uncovers a number of powerful mechanisms in archival production that are often ignored in favor of conventional understandings of archives, including the interrelated roles of

³ The type of acclaim that these two institutions received for their collections is discussed at length at the body of the dissertation.

⁴ Among these scholars are: Arondekar, *For the Record*; Blouin Jr, Francis Xavier and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*; Burton et al., *Archive Stories*; Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power”; Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*; Derrida, “Archive Fever”; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*; Steedman, *Dust*; Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*. The development of archival theory will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

affect, race, and media in shaping the collection process in physical museums and public contributions in the digital realm.

These important insights are only revealed through the comparison of the first two instances of disaster collecting, which are arguably quite different. September 11, 2001 is figured as an attack by a foreign enemy, in the Northern industrial city of New York City. The disaster appeared to be immediate, creating an overwhelming shock when the Twin Towers were obliterated. The response to the attacks created the figure of heroes in the form of New York City firefighters and police officers, purportedly saw a uniting of the American people across difference to mourn the loss of life, and ushered in a supposed new era in U.S. history, marked by a perpetual war against terrorism. On the other hand, Hurricane Katrina is figured as a disaster that resulted from nature (or perhaps even an act of God)⁵ that occurred painfully slowly as tens of thousands of people were stranded without help or aid for days on end. It occurred all along the Gulf Coast of the Southern U.S., culminating in the complete devastation of New Orleans. It is thought to have exposed (however temporarily) an unprepared and uncoordinated governmental system and the massive inequality resulting from economic disparity and racialized structures of power. This dissertation argues that it is because of these differences that these two disaster events necessitate a careful comparison, for there is much to be lost by categorizing the two events as simply too different in character to merit comparative analysis. Rather,

⁵ Here I refer both to how insurance agencies defined the hurricane as “an act of God”, which often led to many denials of claims. Moreover, Hurricane Katrina was also categorized as “God’s Wrath” by televangelist Pat Robertson on “the hometown of lesbian television celebrity Ellen DeGeneres” (Smith, “Disastrous Accumulation,” 770).

these two disaster events must be read alongside one another as they mark two important points in the contemporary period that reveal the extent of the current relationship between memory, race, gender, class, and national belonging. The two events are different; however, they uncover crucial similarities in the ways in which existing racialized cultural memories were (re)deployed to explain the cause and response of each disaster event, which were then immediately preserved by historical institutions, thereby creating affective ties within the archives to position some victims as worthy of national remembering and others as not. Therefore, tracking the implementation of these new disaster collection methods exposes the extent of the power that lies within the proverbial shelves of the archive.

The comparison of the two disaster collection efforts reveals significant differences in each archive's content and configuration that result in different levels of personalized and emotional attention given to the two respective victim groups. The NMAH's September 11th collection is extremely well-organized, contains extensive personal information relating to each object in its collection, documents the thoughts and feeling of its curators regarding the collection process of 9/11 objects on its website, and led to the creation of a traveling exhibit relating to its objects. The September 11 Digital Archive contains over 150,000 digital objects, the bulk of which are text-based submissions by individuals outside of New York City and Washington, D.C. that explain the contributor's sorrow about the lives lost in the attacks, fear of his/her loss of an innocent way of life and/or another terrorist attack, and anger at the terrorists responsible for the attacks. On the other hand, the

NMAH's Hurricane Katrina collection is extremely unorganized, contains little to no personal information relating to the collected objects, does not have any sort of website, let alone display of curator thoughts and feelings, and never resulted in an exhibit relating to the objects. The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank contains only 25,000 digital objects, despite the enormous growth in social media between 2001 and 2005. Moreover, these digital objects are almost exclusively from direct survivors of the hurricane. Therefore, expressions of sorrow, fear, and anger from indirect witnesses outside the Gulf Coast Region are virtually absent.

Rather than write these key differences off as merely a result of the different nature of each disaster, I argue that they reveal the ways in which emotion, the media, and the collecting process itself intermingle to produce two very different renderings of national belonging that have serious consequences as these disaster archives come to serve as the repositories of the past for future generations. The physical and digital components of the September 11th disaster archive rely on principles of whiteness to render the September 11th victims heroic citizens, whose deaths deserve national mourning. Whereas the Hurricane Katrina disaster archive activates notions of Blackness equated with poverty, disposability, and criminality to disassociate the victims of Hurricane Katrina from US national identity, thereby granting them only distant sympathy. Therefore, taken together, the first two instances of disaster archive demonstrate the powerful roles of emotion and race in shaping notions of national belonging within the space of the archive. This introductory chapter proceeds with an explanation of the ethnographic approach to archives used in this

study that marks an important contribution to the field of political science, a discussion of this project's unique approach to cultural memory theory, the context in which the two respective events unfolded, and an outline of the substantive chapters of this dissertation.

Ethnography of the Archives

The study of the politics of memory and archives have recently become flourishing fields of interdisciplinary work,⁶ but political science as a discipline has yet to grapple with the interesting questions such inquiries provoke. Therefore, this project brings theories of nation-building and citizenship (central themes within political science) together with an interdisciplinary set of methodologies to analyze the ways in which the many layers of power operate in archival production. As Avery Gordon explains, "Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the

⁶ Among these authors are: Featherstone, "Archive"; Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*; Havel, "In Search of a Theory of Public Memory"; Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*; Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*; Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies"; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Knauer, *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*; Schwartz, "The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln"; Richard, *Cultural Residues*; Nora, "Between Memory and History"; *Collective Remembering*; LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*; Knapp, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past"; Koselleck and Tribe, *Futures Past*; Huyssen, *Present Pasts*. Moreover, an interdisciplinary journal, entitled "Memory Studies," was founded in 2008. Many of the same authors noted above have also published in the journal.

present.”⁷ Such an analysis of power requires attention to the ways in which it operates through structures of race, gender, class, sexuality, and national identity. Therefore, this study centers an intersecting conception of race within archival investigations, while simultaneously building on a recent call within the field of political science to see race as an operating principle of politics, rather than as an exceptional and irrational belief that is auxiliary to “real” political objects of study. Frymer, et. al. explain, “race and racial inequality continue to be regarded by the broader discipline as external to and separate from the ‘true’ objects of political study, such as Congress, courts, bureaucracy, and political behavior.”⁸ In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Frymer et. al. continue their analysis of this egregious fault within the discipline, by making a call for bringing “race back into a study of politics” by giving “greater attention to the ways that race intersects with other forms of inequality, greater attention to political institutions as they embody and reproduce these inequalities, and a return to the study of power, particularly its role in the maintenance of ascriptive hierarchies.”⁹ Because the discipline of political science lacks the methodological tools to conduct such an analysis of power, it must turn to and give due credit to, the field of women of color feminisms, that has long employed an intersecting conception of power in its analysis.¹⁰ Consequently, this dissertation heeds Frymer, et. al.’s call by bringing an intersectional theory of power, developed

⁷ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 3.

⁸ Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren, “New Orleans Is Not the Exception,” 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰ Some of the founding theorists of this approach include: Davis, *Women, Race & Class*; Cheng, “The Development of Feminist Consciousness Among Asian American Women”; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*; Sandoval, “US Third World Feminism”; Hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman*; Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins.”

from the rich theory of women of color feminisms to bear on a number of central themes that motivate the field of political science, such as questions of national identity, nation-state formation, national belonging, and citizenship through an analysis of the archive as an object of study. As this dissertation demonstrates, it is within the very production of archives that the nation-state is legitimized; national identity is (re)formed; and notions of national belonging are policed by national subjects themselves. In this sense, archives are at the very heart of the field of political science.

In order to begin to access how such power operates in the space of the archives, this study conducts an ethnography of the archive, where one does not merely extract materials from an archive, but instead analyzes the very production of the archive – the logics of its construction, the categorization of its contents, and the conditions which made its existence possible. In “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” Ann Laura Stoler explains that “archival labour tends to remain more an extractive enterprise than an ethnographic one...Students of the colonial experience “mine” the *content* of government commissions and reports, but rarely attend to their peculiar *form* or *context*.”¹¹ For Stoler, merely mining the archives for materials treats the archives only as sites of knowledge retrieval instead of sites of knowledge production. Therefore, she argues that archives must be viewed as “epistemological experiments rather than as sources” in which “power relations were

¹¹ Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 90.

inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves.”¹² According to this point of view, archives become complex processes, rather than a static thing or place – a point that draws theoretical inspiration from a number of critical archival scholars, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Spivak, whose work is detailed in the following chapter. Stoler explains that this type of archival analysis would focus on “identifying the conditions of possibility that shaped what could be written, what warranted repetition, what competencies were rewarded in archival writing, what stories could not be told, and what could not be said.”¹³ In this way, she explains one must “pause at, rather than bypass, [the colonial archive’s] conventions, those practices that make up its unspoken order, its rubrics of organization, its rules of placement and reference. Archival conventions might designate who were reliable ‘sources,’ what constituted ‘enough’ evidence and what - in the absence of information - could be filled in to make a credible plot.”¹⁴ She refers to this practice of archival analysis as creating an ethnography of the archive: “The breadth of global reference and span of lateral vision that colonial regimes unevenly embraced suggest that an ethnographic sensibility, rather than an extractive gesture, may be more appropriate for identifying how nations, empires, and racialized regimes were fashioned - not in ways that display confident knowledge and know-how, but in disquieted and expectant modes.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 87.

¹³ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹⁵ Ibid., 109.

Theories of Memory

Stoler's call to create an ethnography of the archive is primarily concerned with analyzing the power involved in giving meaning to the past, which of course, has a significant impact on the understanding of the present and the directions of the future. McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland and Ketelaar explain the direct connection of the power of archives in the present. They argue that "frameworks for the selection, collection, arrangement and description, preservation and accessibility of archives are, therefore, closely linked to societal processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, and the power relationships they embody. In this sense, archives are always political sites of contested memory and knowledge."¹⁶ Because of these issues of power relating to what is remembered in archives and how it is remembered, I turn away from strict and traditional historical methods of analysis, and toward the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. Memory scholars argue that because an objective past is impossible, one should proceed with a theory of memory that more accurately captures the way that meaning is given to the past with all of its contention and changing points of view. Ross Poole sums up this difference as follows, "if the goal of history is that it be written in third person, memory is always written in first person."¹⁷ Because of this acknowledgement that memory is "written in the first person" or that it is subjective as opposed to objective, memory scholars underscore the direct relationship between memory and identity. David Thelen explains that "questions about the construction of memory can

¹⁶ McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory," 2.

¹⁷ Poole, "Memory, History and the Claims of the Past," 159.

illuminate how individuals, ethnic groups, political parties, and cultures shape and reshape their identities – as known to themselves and to others.”¹⁸ This bears particular importance when thinking through the collective, social, and cultural elements of memory.¹⁹

The work on collective memory is generally traced back to Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Emile Durkheim, who is credited with introducing the social or collective dimension to the study of memory in the early twentieth century. In *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that individual memories are always socially framed.²⁰ Memory is “not a matter of reflecting philosophically on inherent properties of the subjective mind; memory is a matter of how minds work together in society.”²¹ The functioning of memory is actually structured or framed by social arrangements. In addressing Halbwachs’ work, Elisabeth Jelin sees these social frameworks as bearing “the general representations of society, its needs and values. They also include the worldview and language of a society or group.”²² According to Halbwachs, when a person forgets, she is actually losing these frameworks, or at least parts of them.²³ Memories, then, are more reconstructions than recollections, where, “anything that does not find a place or a meaning in that framework is material that

¹⁸ Thelen, “Memory and American History,” 1118.

¹⁹ I am indebted to my dear friend and brilliant colleague, Jenny Escobar Navia, for spending countless hours together poring through the vast amount of literature on memory to extract this formulation of the contours of the field and the central parts of its method of analysis.

²⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²² Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*

can be lost and forgotten (Namer 1994).”²⁴ Therefore, even in what could appear the most individual or personal moment, the social is always present.

This understanding of memory as inherently collective has shaped the field of memory studies, leading many scholars to study the relationship between identity formation and collective memory. Because of this connection between the two, collective memory is seen as a non-linear account of the past, in which, as Elisabeth Jelin explains, “the sense of time and temporality are established in a different way: the present contains and constructs past experience and future expectations.”²⁵ This non-linear understanding of the past is, of course, in direct opposition to History, which seeks to create clean, linear, and progressive narratives that often lead to deterministic understandings of the present. These clean and linear narratives often flatten out and mask the very real power struggles involved in giving meaning to the past. Therefore, it is of critical importance to dwell in the contested sites of memory²⁶ in order to study the complex structures and relations of power.

Because of these important and valid critiques of history, together with the many productive possibilities that a collective account of memory opens up, I employ a cultural memory lens to the study of archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, as cultural memory works to dwell in spaces of conflict in order to analyze the past, it productively supplements an ethnographic approach to analyzing archives which draws attention to the complex conditions

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*.

which make the archive possible. My approach to cultural memory expands upon recent feminist, cultural theory scholarship, especially that of Marita Sturken and Macarena Gomez-Barris. I argue that cultural memory theory contains four, main integrative components that are critical to understanding how meaning is given to the past. First, the past is understood as circular, as opposed to linear, where the past is always in some ways present and thereby directly informs the future. Second, remembering the past is always culturally framed: as Raymond Williams²⁷ argues, culture is a site of contested, rather than shared, meaning. Third, the meaning bestowed upon past events directly impacts the construction and maintenance of identity, both individual and collective. Fourth, because of the non-linear understanding of the past, together with its culturally framed character, cultural memory is always embedded within the power matrixes of a given context, and therefore a study of the past requires detailed analysis of those power structures. By constructing these four components of a cultural memory frame of analysis, this dissertation makes an important contribution to the theoretical development of the field of memory studies.

Bringing this cultural memory lens into an ethnography of the archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina allows for a direct engagement with the structures and logics that made these archives possible, together with the type of images of national belonging and nationhood that are produced in their content and organization. Therefore, I use these methods of analyses to examine

²⁷ Williams, *Long Revolution*.

museum acquisition files (the files which detail the provenance of each collected object) and Internet archives submissions. Moreover, I supplement this analysis with interviews with key staff members involved in collecting processes in each archive.²⁸ This interdisciplinary methodology opens up the possibility of examining the complexities of power and nation-building at work in the mechanics of archival production.

Comparing Disaster

As previously discussed, in order to interrogate the practices of nation-building that occur through disaster archives, Hurricane Katrina and September 11, 2001 must be compared. Not only do the two events mark the first two instances of disaster collecting, but each event also occurred in cities that uniquely represent American culture. The image of New York City is often made to symbolize many of

²⁸ While I will go into more detail concerning the specific methodologies I employed for analyzing each type of archive in the following chapters, I generally worked to combine interviews from key staff at each archive with analysis of the archives structure, organization, and contents. In each interview I asked the same questions regarding why they created an archive, why they felt it was important to do so, whether collecting recent material was new for them, and whether they felt the collection of these recent events marked any kind of change within their field. However, I also allowed each interview to take its own course, opting for a more open-ended conversation and also asking necessary follow-up questions concerning points that were new to me. Moreover, I conducted the research for this dissertation during 2009. I was afforded a graduate fellowship through the University of California, Washington, D.C. program from January through March, 2009. While there, I conducted research at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and conducted interviews with members of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, who worked on the September 11 Digital Archive and Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. Additionally, I made two separate research trips to New York City to conduct interviews with members of Asociación Tepeyac de New York and members of the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at City University of New York's Graduate Center, who worked on the September 11 Digital Archive. From the middle of June to the middle of July with support from a Dianne Woest Fellowship in the Arts and Humanities from the Historic New Orleans Collection, I conducted research at the New Orleans State Museum and conducted interviews with members of Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, and the Pointe-au-Chien and the Isle de Jean Charles Band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees Native American tribes.

the contradictory characteristics of the United States, such as a “melting pot” of cultures as a historic and current port of entry for many immigrants, the center of American and global capital, and a hub in the culture industry including design, theatre, and music. While at times not as directly noted, New Orleans is also an important center for industry and music, particularly jazz that functions as a symbolic city in the production of American culture.

Lawrence Levine explains that one cannot understand the birth of a truly unique American culture apart from the development of jazz. Most origin stories of jazz date it to the 18th century in dances and songs slaves from West Africa would perform on Congo Square, in New Orleans – the literal auction block for much of the slave trade in the United States. Over the years and with much controversy, the African rhythms fused with various components of European traditions to form the genre known as jazz. This style of music was largely racialized and relegated to the margins of the music world for violating established norms, but by the mid-20th century jazz became the “the most widely identifiable and emulated symbol of American culture throughout the world.”²⁹ Therefore, in many ways, jazz constitutes the first truly unique form of American culture. Moreover, jazz and its related musical form, blues, have served as tools of survival for African American communities in the face of enslavement, discrimination, and injustice. In “Do you Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?: Katrina, Trap Economics and the

²⁹ Levine, “Jazz and American Culture,” 15.

Rebirth of the Blues,” Clyde Woods quotes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in a speech at the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival:

Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life's difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph. This is triumphant music. And now, Jazz is exported to the world. For in the particular struggle of the Negro in America there is something akin to the universal struggle of modern man. Everybody has the Blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith. In music, especially this broad category called Jazz, there is a stepping stone towards all of these.³⁰

Consequently, jazz also represents a tool for the advancement of true freedom and equality, the supposed fundamental goals of the United States.

While both cities have significant symbolic value in the cultural imaginary of the U.S., there is certainly no doubt that the type of disaster in the two cases is different – one considered an attack by an enemy and the other the result of a mixture of natural phenomena and institutional failures. However, as noted above, reading these two events alongside one another reveals the ways in which similar racialized structures of power were used to make sense of the two devastating disasters, and then shape the immediate collection and preservation efforts created to gather material related to the respective events. In order to dissect the complexities of these structures of power, it is necessary to contextualize the circumstances in which the two disaster events occurred, which requires detailed attention to the roles of cultural memory, affect, and the media in framing understandings of the events.

³⁰ Woods, “Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?,” 11.

September 11, 2001: Interpreting Shock

As is already well-known, on September 11, 2001 hijacked passenger airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and an abandoned field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The planes that were flown into the World Trade Center are thought to have caused their collapse and obliteration. The estimated deaths related to these airplane attacks center around 3,000. In the immediate aftermath of the events, there was an overwhelming sense of shock among many in the United States and around the world. This sense of shock was cultivated by the rapid and complete oblivion of the World Trade Center, the round-the-clock, spectacularized news coverage, and the Bush Administration's declaration of new war – a war against terrorism. Because the unique characteristics of disaster archives necessitated immediate collection, these factors also played a central role in shaping the archives.

In many ways, the instant obliteration of the World Trade Center from the New York City skyline generated a profound “shock of absence”³¹ in the American psyche. New York City has come to serve as a symbol of American identity with all its contradictions, and the image of the New York City skyline is often employed to perform that symbolic work. As the tallest buildings in the skyline, the World Trade Center served as a cornerstone in that panoramic view. Marita Sturken explains that in their thirty years of existence, the meaning of towers changed from “the folly of oversized public building projects, the banal glass towers of modernity's fading years,

³¹ Sturken, “Memorializing Absence.”

the symbol of New York tourism, and, later, the arrogance of American capital,” yet they never “signified more than in their absence.”³² According to Sturken, this shock of absence generates a fear of oblivion that can only be assuaged by filling the void with objects. In *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, Sturken chronicles the impulse to fill this void with memorialization efforts and memorabilia objects relating to the Twin Towers, firefighters, and New York City more generally.³³ She explains that these objects “that focus on loss and memory through narratives of redemption inevitably collapse history into simple narratives. The focus of such objects is invariably not the why of such events or the complexities of history so much as it is about producing feelings of comfort.”³⁴ It is precisely this desire to feel comfort in the face of loss that motivates the collection and organization efforts of both the Smithsonian’s NMAH and the September 11 Digital Archive, which will be seen in the following chapters.

The 1980s and 90s saw the emergence of an increasingly common strain of thought, epitomized by the work of Stephen Heath,³⁵ that “transformations in the production of political consciousness that have taken place in the context of developments in global media culture have made the category ‘citizen’ archaic... [and, further] that television promotes the annihilation of memory and, in particular, of historical knowledge and political self-understanding.”³⁶ However, such thinking proved patently false as many people turned to the television to understand the events

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ Sturken, *Tourists of History*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Heath, *Representing Television*.

³⁶ Berlant, “The Theory of Infantile Citizenship,” 396–7.

of September 11th, where they were met with strict lessons of citizenship, patriotism, and national belonging.

As news of the plane attacks quickly circulated in the early morning of September 11, 2001, many people turned to television news stations to learn about the situation. The images that people saw on television were extremely graphic and spectacular. Images of the planes smashing into the towers, people jumping from the towers, the controlled and instant collapse of the towers, and the confused, injured victims in search of shelter were not just shown but re-ran endlessly. The centrality of television in American life, together with spectacularization of the attacks meant, as Anker explains, “for most American news viewers, the media coverage of September 11 was the primary experience of the terrorist act. Hence...comprehension of the attack was generated through the news footage.”³⁷ Therefore, the horror of the images on the television screen created a sense of trauma³⁸ and the desire to make sense of them. Bernhard Debatin explains that the need for television news correspondents and producers to instantly make sense of the extremely chaotic situation unfolding in front of their eyes led to “a simplifying and mainstreaming narrative centered on a desire for retaliation.”³⁹ Brian Monahan notes that it was not only a frame of retaliation that media relied upon, but also what he calls tropes of

³⁷ Anker, “Villains, Victims and Heroes,” 23.

³⁸ Countless studies have emerged detailing the level trauma provoked by the attacks not only for those who directly experienced the attacks, but also those who watch the television news coverage. For example: Butler et al., “Posttraumatic Growth Following the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001”; Edkins, “Forget Trauma?”; Galea et al., “Psychological Sequelae of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks in New York City”; Galea et al., “Trends of Probable Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in New York City After the September 11 Terrorist Attacks”; Schuster et al., “A National Survey of Stress Reactions After the September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks.”

³⁹ Debatin, “‘Plane Wreck with Spectators’,” 172.

“dealing and healing;” in other words, focusing on “stories about the physical response at the three crash sites” and “stories about the emotional or cognitive processing of these events.”⁴⁰ Together, this framing “evoked a dominant frame that advanced the twin notions of American victimization and the need for a militaristic hunt for justice.”⁴¹ Anker sees this framing as part of the relationship between the production of melodrama and national identity present in the news accounts. She explains,

America is fashioned as an imagined community unadulterated by immorality or evil. The country is designated as both unified and virtuous, and any state action taken at this time is predicated by the justification of moral righteousness. Clear demarcations and culturally identifiable patriotic significations denote America’s resounding goodness. Through the melodramatic narrative, “the American people” become a united entity whose shared values and social solidarity create a homogeneous body. The American people’s virtue extends naturally from their practice of democratic freedom; decency and righteousness are intertwined with the designation “freedom loving people.” American ideals of freedom, free markets, and democracy serve to reinforce the ideal of an honorable and politically unified nation of virtuous common folk.⁴²

It is centrally important to note that this notion of a “unified American people” largely relied on what Ruth Frankenberg describes as “discourses of ‘whiteness’ and ‘Americanness’ understood in terms of the notion of manifest destiny, of Judeo-Christian notions of goodness and innocence, and of particular understandings of fairness and justice.”⁴³ Moreover, whiteness emerges “not as a cultural and historical category but normalized as ‘not...anything in particular,’” thereby obtaining

⁴⁰ Monahan, *The Shock of the News*, 66.

⁴¹ Monahan, *The Shock of the News*, 64.

⁴² Anker, “Villains, Victims and Heroes,” 25.

⁴³ Frankenberg, “Cracks in the Facade,” 568.

“hegemonic invisibility.”⁴⁴ These discourses also operated through the (re)emergence of “militaristic ‘super-patriotism,’” Mukherjee explains, that played “around the clock on television stations nationwide emerging as the new standard of political correctness.”⁴⁵ Therefore, television was hardly a banal form of entertainment, but rather, as Lauren Berlant explains, in all its modes of production “television encounters, engages, and represents citizenship.”⁴⁶ Consequently, “the work of the media in redefining citizenship and framing what can legitimately be read as national pedagogy becomes more, not less, central to any analysis of political identity in postmodern American culture.”⁴⁷

In their melodramatic depiction of the events of September 11, 2001, the media (re)activated established “frames of acceptance”⁴⁸ including, as explained above, American innocence and exceptionalism in order to make sense of the events. Elaine Tyler May explains that “moments of historical crisis” often call for “‘frames of acceptance,’ in which new situations are met with old frames...Although ‘new factors...bewilder the old frame, which is not designed to encompass them,’ the frame ‘will be extended to meet the new necessities by casuistic stretching.’”⁴⁹ From the perspective of cultural memory and performance studies, Diana Taylor also discusses such framing, which she calls ‘scenario thinking’.⁵⁰ In order to stress the embodiedness of memory, Taylor argues that the present can be thought of as relying

⁴⁴ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 44; See also: Dyer, “The Matter of Whiteness.”

⁴⁵ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 236.

⁴⁶ Berlant, “The Theory of Infantile Citizenship,” 396.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 397–8.

⁴⁸ May, “Echoes of the Cold War.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 36.

⁵⁰ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

on reoccurring scenarios that have played out in the past. She explains that scenarios are a “sketch or outline of the plot of a play giving particulars of the scenes, situations, etc.,” which always mean “never for the first time.”⁵¹ Therefore, scenarios can be thought of as “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes,” which make “visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes.”⁵² Moreover, “the framework allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others.”⁵³ Taylor’s conception of scenario thinking is important for understanding how racialized cultural memories – always a mixture of remembering and forgetting – work to make sense of the seemingly unimaginable events of September 11, 2001.

It is precisely such ‘scenario thinking’ that has been used to legitimate and sustain the U.S. government’s war on terrorism. The positioning of America as an innocent victim to a heinous and unprovoked attack was also employed by the Bush Administration to declare war against terrorism. May explains that “U.S. officials immediately identified Osama bin Laden as the mastermind behind the plot and declared war on his Al Qaeda network as well as any government that tolerated terrorists within its borders.”⁵⁴ The Bush Administration stressed that this was a new war, different than anything in the past, which required new tactics and a new vigilance. These new tactics, which were enumerated in the cleverly titled USA

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ May, “Echoes of the Cold War,” 40.

Patriot Act, included significantly limiting many civil liberties in the name of security and foregrounding a newly consolidated, racialized suspect category – Arab/Muslim.⁵⁵ Moreover, American citizens were called upon to unite across race and difference in order keep America safe by constantly looking out for potential terrorists and threats to the nation, which effectively amounted to wholesale racial profiling against anyone appearing “Arab” or “Muslim”.⁵⁶ Such vigilance led to a drastic increase in hate crimes against Arab and Muslim individuals and communities. In the year after September 11, 2001 “there were more than 1,000 incidents of hate violence” directed against those appearing to be “Arab,” “Middle Eastern”, or “Muslim” reported in the United States.⁵⁷ Mukherjee explains that many people of color also felt called to “join in these vicious plays of belonging and Othering, partaking in racist repression and violence as a means to make their way, however temporarily and partially, into the elusive fraternity of ‘colorblind’ citizenship.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, the ‘war on terror’ led to the on-going wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the countries’ infrastructures have been destroyed and well over 1 million people have been killed, which may be a low estimate given no agencies are permitted to keep an accurate count.⁵⁹

The call to war and self-surveillance in the name of securing the nation, together with shock of the instant and graphic loss of life worked to create an

⁵⁵ Volpp, Leti, “The Citizen and the Terrorist.”

⁵⁶ Grewal, “Transnational America.”

⁵⁷ Volpp, Leti, “The Citizen and the Terrorist,” 147.

⁵⁸ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 236.

⁵⁹ Orb. “More than 1,000,000 Iraqis murdered since 2003 invasion.” <http://www.zcommunications.org/more-than-1-000-000-iraqis-murdered-since-2003-invasion-by-orb>. Accessed 2/5/12.

environment of fear that stifled public debate and led to the emergence of a new political consensus.⁶⁰ May explains, “Democrats and Republicans closed ranks, and few if any dared to question the president or the administration. Republicans were quick to brand anyone who criticized the administration as ‘giving aid and comfort to our enemies.’”⁶¹ The emergence of this new political consensus largely resulted from the figuring of September 11th as an attack on the very essence of America, namely its core values of freedom and equality, by a brutal and irrational foreign enemy. As President Bush explained in his address to the nation on September 11, 2001:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.⁶²

President Bush’s speech, and the larger scenarios and frames it represents, consequently called on all citizens who value freedom and equality to help in securing the nation, which, as explained above, often resulted in violent racial profiling. Moreover, to question these new citizen mandates, or such patriotic framing more broadly, became traitorous. It was in this environment that disaster archives were born, which had a lasting effect on the archives’ content and configuration.

⁶⁰ May, “Echoes of the Cold War,” 48.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Text of Bush’s Address.” http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-cts?_s=PM:US. Accessed 9/5/11.

September 11th Disaster Collections

As will be explained in chapter three, the Smithsonian's NMAH September 11th Collection houses material that relates to a very limited timeline – it begins with the plane attacks on the morning of September 11, 2001, includes the rescue attempt, and ends with the recovery and clean-up efforts. Moreover, it only contains materials relating to Americans. Therefore, the collection does not contain any information relating to historical and political events prior to September 11, 2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after the attacks, the supposed terrorists responsible for the attacks or the organization they are said to represent, Al-Qaeda. Rather, the collection contains material that is often deeply personal in nature, such as identification cards, wallets, tools, and pieces of rubble that are made to represent the many lives lost in the attacks. Additionally, each item collected contains a lengthy file that documents the life of the person who once owned the collected item. As a result of this condensed timeline and the nature of the materials collected, the collection functions as a national memorial to the lives lost devoid of any gesture to critical thought. Such content and configuration works to produce an emotional connection with the lives lost, largely figured as hard-working, white Americans.

This same type of affective connection is glaringly evident in the September 11 Digital Archive, which contains over 150,000 digital objects digitally collected from anyone who wished to contribute. This digital material largely consists of text-based messages of mourning for the lives lost, fear of another potential terrorist attack, anger at the terrorists, and shock or confusion relating to the events.

Additionally, there are tens of thousands of photographs of the events of the day, as well as many creative, and often xenophobic pieces of digital art, that show patriotic symbols or violence being inflicted upon racialized, terrorist figures. The material in the digital archive evidences the same ‘scenario thinking’ noted above that mourns the lives and American innocence lost, while simultaneously attending to the production of an enemy-terrorist responsible for these losses. As such, this new form of digital disaster collecting demonstrates the ways in which members of the general public activated racialized cultural memories to construct notions of national belonging marked by strict, and often violent, borders of exclusion. Because these racialized cultural memories are so deeply engrained into ideas of American values, calling upon them to construct a new enemy to the state and “American way of life” made “common sense.”⁶³ However, because of the open collection policy within this new digital disaster archiving process, in which all submissions regardless of their content were accepted, the digital archive contains a small, but important virtual wing explaining the work of Asociación Tepeyac de New York.

Asociación Tepeyac is a non-profit dedicated “to promoting the social welfare and human rights of Latino immigrants, specifically the undocumented in New York City.”⁶⁴ It estimates that nearly 100 undocumented workers are still unaccounted for in the list of victims of September 11, 2001, thus rendering them disappeared. This lack of ever having confirmation has a devastating effect on the family members of

⁶³Here I am referring to W.E.B. DuBois’ explanation of the racism as becoming common sense. This conception has been taken up by many critical race studies and cultural studies scholars to make sense of the pervasiveness of racism. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn*; Mukherjee, See also: *The Racial Order Of Things*; Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*; Gray, *Watching Race*.

⁶⁴<http://www.tepeyac.org.ns50.alentus.com/misio.asp>

these workers, many of whom live outside the United States. Moreover, many undocumented Latino workers were among the volunteers and employees contracted to recover and clean-up the debris left from the collapse of the World Trade Center. These workers have very important memories of the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and are continually impacted by it because of severe mental and physical illnesses developed as a result of the work of cleaning-up the debris. Other members of this undocumented community were displaced and made jobless because of the closing off of lower Manhattan for over a year and half, which as a financial capital is the source of thousands of jobs. The vast and varied work conducted by Asociación Tepeyac de New York creates an archive of its own, as the organization worked to document the disappeared, file claims for lost jobs, and demand health benefits and compensation for undocumented workers who labored in the removal process.

The presence of material related to Asociación Tepeyac in the September 11 Digital Archive represents an important point of resistance to the hegemonic ideas of American whiteness, innocence, and exceptionalism that overwhelm the rest of the archive. Moreover, the work of Asociación Tepeyac and the importance of the vast amount of undocumented, immigrant labor that went into sustaining the daily existence of the Twin Towers, together with labor responsible for the removal of the toxic debris that was necessary to return New York City back to its everyday function is otherwise erased from all other digital and physical archives, including the NMAH. Such erasure and invisibility demonstrates the ways in which the “‘us’ of America”

correlates membership with citizenship.⁶⁵ Therefore, making present this absence is crucial to disrupting racialized, unequal notions of American citizenship that are largely reproduced in the space of the archive, preserved for future generations. Consequently, this dissertation also works to dwell on the visible absences within the archives, as well as the productive possibilities, however few, enabled by breaks in dominant notions of national belonging.

Hurricane Katrina: Racialized Frames and Scenarios

A little less than four years after September 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina came on the radar screen of meteorologists around the world. One would have thought that proper planning would have been in place to deal with the wreckage brought by the hurricane given the many lessons that had been learned about the failures of emergency responsiveness and coordination in the face of the destruction on September 11th, together with the fact that Katrina's force and trajectory were predicted well in advance. However, such assumptions proved to be so wrong as to be inconceivable. The following section contextualizes the conditions in which the storm emerged and the role of the media in using racialized 'scenario-thinking' to give meaning to the events. These factors directly impacted the material collected in Katrina disaster archives, which ultimately produced collections that lacked the same emotional memorial aspects present in the September 11 disaster archives, thereby

⁶⁵ Volpp, Leti, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," 160.

distancing the Hurricane Katrina victims from the national imaginary along, together with the rights and privileges connected with the status of national belonging.

On August 29, 2005, the eye of Hurricane Katrina centered above New Orleans. By that time, the Category Five storm had been downgraded to Category Two, and many thought the city would only sustain minor flooding and severe wind damage. However, this assumption also proved horribly wrong. Within a few hours after the storm passed through the city, “water surges in excess of 10 feet high breached levee walls designed to protect this low-lying city, which sits below sea level, from the surrounding waters of Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River, Lake Borgne, and the Gulf of Mexico. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, floodwaters covered almost 80% of the ‘Crescent City.’”⁶⁶ Despite this incredible deluge of water, in some ways the greatest disaster was still yet to come. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin waited until August 28th to issue a mandatory evacuation, which he declared without any real plans in place to help evacuate those in the city, who did not possess a car or the funds to pay for expensive hotel rooms hundreds of miles away.⁶⁷ As a result, tens of thousands of people were left in New Orleans without any real plans to provide them with basic necessities or to evacuate them after the storm passed. Because of this lack of planning and governmental coordination, many people were stranded in 100 degree heat with no food or water until September 3rd –

⁶⁶ Garfield, “Hurricane Katrina,” 56.

⁶⁷ Mayor Nagin did establish a refuge of last resort in the Superdome, but it was not adequately supplied with food, water, or medical supplies.

five days after the storm passed. By the time the flood waters finally receded, nearly 2,000 people were killed.

Those who were most severely impacted by this devastation were the poor and elderly, which disproportionately consisted of African American women.⁶⁸ Pulling from data collected by the Center for Social Inclusion, Troy Allen explains,

Almost one third (28%) of New Orleanians were poor before Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. More than 105,000 city dwellers did not have a car during Katrina's evacuation; nearly two thirds of those were African American. Almost half (44%) of those harmed by the broken levees were African American. More than 11% of New Orleans residents were elderly. Nearly 70% of the poor people affected by the storm were African American. In the city of New Orleans, communities of color made up nearly 80% of the population in the flooded neighborhoods.⁶⁹

Along with many others,⁷⁰ Allen demonstrates that “the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the failure of the levee system, along with the incompetent response by local, state, and federal officials, have brought to the center of our national consciousness issues that have long been on the periphery - namely, the enduring legacy of systematic and structural racism that has resulted in a disproportionate number of African Americans mired in poverty for generations.”⁷¹ While the state and national governments failed to aid the residents of New Orleans, the media was nonetheless able to provide round-the-clock coverage of the devastation. Therefore, just as had been the case with September 11th, the vast

⁶⁸ Gault et al., *The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*.

⁶⁹ Allen, “Katrina,” 468.

⁷⁰ Baugh, “It Ain’t About Race”; Brunnsma, Overfelt, and Picou, *The Sociology of Katrina*; Bobo, “Unmasking Race, Poverty, and Politics in the 21st Century”; Breunlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map”; Camp, “We Know This Place”; Marable, *Seeking Higher Ground*; Potter, *Racing the Storm*; Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina.”

⁷¹ Allen, “Katrina,” 466.

majority of the American public largely experienced the Hurricane Katrina disaster through watching television news coverage. The information that the mainstream media provided the public directly framed how Hurricane Katrina came to be understood and is now being remembered. Media deployed deeply racist scenario-thinking by largely relying on racist images and stereotypes, including looting and lawlessness, to describe the unimaginable devastation caused by the flooding and lack of support, effectively blaming the victims for their situation.

In a detailed study comparing media reports with concrete data, Tierney, et. al. explain that the media was instrumental in circulating inaccurate information that worked to support a militarized government response. They explain that “media reports initially employed a ‘civil unrest’ frame and later characterized victim behavior as equivalent to urban warfare.”⁷² These reports were “later shown to be inaccurate, slanted by sources that were themselves biased, and based more on rumor than on direct observation, reports constructed disaster victims as lawless, violent, exploitative, and almost less than human in the days following Katrina.”⁷³ Moreover, this type of reporting both reflects and reinforces “broader societal and cultural trends, socially constructed metanarratives, and hegemonic discourse practices that support the status quo and the interests of elites.”⁷⁴ These metanarratives fundamentally rely on using assumed Black criminality to exercise draconian and racist policies in the name of social order. Garfield explains, “The media readily

⁷² Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski, “Metaphors Matter,” 57.

⁷³ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 62.

assumed that this breakdown was due largely to black criminality. Black disaster victims were socially positioned as immoral and their behavior was portrayed in media reports as disruptive, threatening, and dangerous.”⁷⁵ Berger echoes this analysis, “building off the established policies and entrenched ideologies that define poor urban black populations as dangerous, both the mainstream media and neo-liberal state created a feedback loop that framed criminality as a salient paradigm for making sense of the flood-ravaged city.”⁷⁶

This framing had violent consequences as it legitimated a slow rescue response and the need to enforce security, often at the expense of sending aid to the victims. Berger explains, “this coverage had both material and discursive impacts; it inserted black criminality as a cause of what was said to be pervasive chaos, thereby lessening criticism of government neglect; it bolstered militarized policing – by local cops, National Guard and Blackwater mercenaries – as a relief effort, which increased Louisiana’s sprawling but already disheveled criminal justice system; and it helped normalize newly privatized structures of housing, labor and education.”⁷⁷ This scenario of using Black criminality in the name of maintaining social order has a long history. Linus Abraham explains, ‘Blackness, as race, in American culture has historically been perceived as synonymous with deviance. In many cases, blackness has become a conventional notation symbolizing abnormality. Its racist symbolic use is so ingrained that, after years of supposed egalitarian trends in the culture, this

⁷⁵ Garfield, “Hurricane Katrina,” 61.

⁷⁶ Berger, “Constructing Crime, Framing Disaster,” 493.

⁷⁷ Ibid.; Flaherty, “Corporate Reconstruction and Grassroots Resistance”; Calhoun, “The Privatization of Risk.”

symbolic notation still appears, albeit subtly, even in arenas where such racist use of language would be most eschewed.”⁷⁸

In addition to ideas of criminality, the media also labeled Hurricane Katrina victims as “refugees,” effectively further distancing African Americans from ideals of U.S. national belonging. Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye explain, “the label ‘refugee’...‘holds a negative social meaning...[suggesting] ‘homelessness,’ ‘poverty,’ and ‘estrangement’ from [one’s] place of origin’”⁷⁹ These negative social meanings also worked to distance African Americans from the rights and privileges that are thought to accompany citizen status. Giroux explains, “Cries of desperation and help were quickly redefined as the pleas of ‘refugees,’ a designation that suggested an alien population lacking both citizenship and legal rights had inhabited the Gulf Coast.”⁸⁰ Moreover, this label worked to naturalize the conditions faced by tens of thousands of African Americans by equating “refugee” with racist conceptions of “Third World.” Giroux states, “Dead people, mostly poor African-Americans, left uncollected in the streets, on porches, hospitals, nursing homes, in electric wheelchairs, and in collapsed houses prompted some people to claim that America had become like a ‘Third World country’ while others argued that New Orleans resembled a ‘Third World Refugee Camp.’”⁸¹ Furthermore, Masquelier, referencing the work of Douglas, Malkki, and Arendt⁸² argues that the status of refugee

⁷⁸ Lester and Ross, *Images That Injure*, 90.

⁷⁹ Masalha, *Catastrophe Remembered*, 83 quoted in Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye, “Looking Back to Move Forward,” 117.

⁸⁰ Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina,” 177.

⁸¹ “Our Homegrown Third World,” 1–2 quoted in Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina,” 173.

⁸² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Malkki, *Purity and Exile*; Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

constitutes “an aberration,” “an expression of liminality [and] a zone of pollution. Because it challenges ‘time-honored distinctions between nationals and foreigners,’ [refugees’] transitional status becomes a source of metaphorical ‘dirt’ and, therefore, danger.”⁸³ Consequently, calling African American Hurricane Katrina victims “refugees at a time when they more than ever needed to belong took away their citizenship, and by implication, their right to be part of the national order of things.”⁸⁴

This racialized framing of the “naturalness” of the conditions of African American Katrina survivors has a direct impact on the interrelationship of affect and memorializing that now informs the practice of disaster collecting in the field of historical preservation. Garfield explains that “‘mass media convey impressions that Blacks and Whites occupy different moral universes.’ In those different universes, whites perceived blacks as morally inferior and thereby possessing codes of conduct that violates the norms of ‘good citizenship’ in white society...This impression of black behavior not only provides justifications for how African Americans should be treated when the norms of society are breached. But it also can reduce white empathy for black pain, harm, and injury even in disastrous circumstances.”⁸⁵ The impact of the racialized media framing of Hurricane Katrina is seen in both the Smithsonian’s NMAH collection and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, though in different ways.

⁸³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 286 quoted in Masquelier, “Why Katrina’s Victims Aren’t Refugees,” 737.

⁸⁴ Masquelier, “Why Katrina’s Victims Aren’t Refugees,” 737.

⁸⁵ Garfield, “Hurricane Katrina,” 61.

Hurricane Katrina Disaster Collecting

As chapter four demonstrates, while the NMAH tried to be inclusive in their collection efforts, the “racialized order of things”⁸⁶ affected the types of objects they collected. Instead of collecting objects with a deeply personal character, as had been the case with the objects in the September 11th collection, the museum collected objects that emphasized the environmental devastation. Moreover, the museum did not create an exhibition relating to objects, thereby significantly limiting the public’s interaction and reflection on the objects. The content and configuration of the Hurricane Katrina collection then does not function as memorial to the victims, but instead subtly distances them from the national imagination. This same distancing is at work in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (as described in chapter six), as the digital archive contains only a handful of contributions from indirect witnesses, those who watched the disaster unfold from the comfort of their unaffected and remote homes. The outcome of this second disaster collection effort, therefore, differs quite dramatically from the first. These differences demonstrate the ways in which racialized thinking informs collecting efforts, and consequently structures notions of national belonging by relying upon emotions to either create or distance disaster victims from ideals of citizenship.

Within this complicated and uneven terrain of racialized ‘scenario-thinking’ that works to legitimate and naturalize governmental neglect lays important forms of resistance that challenge the very premise of these scenarios. One important

⁸⁶ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*.

community of resistance is the Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees (BCCM)⁸⁷ and the Pointe-au-Chien, two neighboring Native American tribes, who have persevered despite the full force of multiple hurricanes and the complete disavowal of their existence by the federal government. These two neighboring communities are located about 75 miles southwest of New Orleans in the Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes. They were virtually destroyed by Katrina and then devastated again by Rita (2005), Gustav (2008), and Ike (2008). They continue to remain at risk from future storms as they lay outside the levee system with no plans by the state of Louisiana to address this critical issue. Their situation is made dire, because of the lack of any natural marsh barriers to lessen the severity of the storms. These marshlands have been decimated by the oil and gas industry, which cuts canals in the marsh without taking measures to restore them. The salt water intrusion caused by these canals has resulted in a 93 percent loss of land in the last 50 years.

In the face of this environmental devastation, the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM have been dealt another painful blow as the federal government refuses to recognize them as “legitimate” Indian Tribes – a status that would have provided them with crucial resources and aid needed to rebuild and better protect themselves from future storms. Their struggles to gain federal recognition demonstrate the immense power of the archive to draw strict and often violent boundaries of national belonging as the tribes must use written evidence housed in a variety of different and unrelated archives to “prove” their very existence. This powerful role of archives to document

⁸⁷ I use the same acronym in the paper as the tribe employs.

existence is continued by the complete absence of any mention of the tribes or their struggles in any of the disaster archives, digital or physical. Despite this continuing colonial project of erasure, the BCCM and Pointe-au-Chien continue to struggle and survive, relying on each other for help and support. Their struggles represent another important rupture in dominant notions of citizenship and national belonging that are perpetuated through archival power. Therefore, this dissertation also works to make their absence present by discussing their struggles to gain federal recognition and the serious consequences of their continued erasure in the disaster archives. The importance of their struggles and claims for citizenship and archival theory will be discussed at length in the conclusion chapter.

Conclusion

Through the comparison of the September 11th and Hurricane Katrina disaster archives, the birth of the new method of disaster collection reveals many uneven and racialized structures within the process of creating archives and their resulting content. Because of the unique qualities of disaster archives, including the necessity of immediate collection, the collection of destroyed materials to represent loss, and the digital capture of public responses, the media plays a key role in framing what should be collected in order to make sense of the disasters. As both the events of September 11th and Hurricane Katrina make clear, such framing relies on racialized cultural memories to make sense of the unimaginably destructive situations. The activation of such ‘scenario-thinking’ works to mask the cracks in the dominant

structures of power unearthed by the disasters, such as U.S. susceptibility to outside attack, uncoordinated and inept governmental institutions, and a geopolitical system that maps areas of greatest vulnerability onto inequality based on race, class, and gender. Moreover, the affective ties produced through these racialized cultural memories work to structure notions of national belonging by centering whiteness in memorializing efforts, while distancing “others” from the national imaginary because of their race, class, or citizenship status by naturalizing their inequality or completely erasing their existence. Within the following pages, this dissertation works to “dwell” in the uneven political site of disaster archives by analyzing how they are constituted, organized, and preserved for future generations.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two: Archival Power and the Nation-State

In the following chapter, I trace the evolution of archival theory noting the interconnected relationship between the development of archives, museums, and nation-states. By using the work of many critical scholars of archival studies, including Foucault, Derrida, Spivak, Cvetkovich, Stoler, Nesmith, and Cook, among others, this chapter exposes the very constructed nature of the archive. Archival production is not an objective process or a mere reflection of history, but is rather directly impacted by the subjectivity of archivists and the institutional norms in which they work. Analyzing the key steps in archival production – material selection, categorization, and retrieval reveals how all archival procedures are products of

interpretation. Therefore, archives become seen not as neutral storehouses for historical materials that foster access to an untampered-with past as they are often popularly figured, but rather contested spaces of knowledge production embedded within the power structures of society.

Chapter Three: Collecting Disaster: The National Museum of American History and September 11, 2001

This dissertation chapter tracks the birth and implementation of the new method of disaster collecting at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH). The evolution of this new practice within the field of historical preservation reveals key mechanisms involved in giving meaning to the events of September 11, 2001 through the production of cultural memories. Among the most important of these mechanisms is the role that affect plays in structuring the archives, and simultaneously producing national subjects through the archives' content and configurations. Because disaster events are seen as moments of crisis in the nation that must be carefully preserved, unpacking this process of preservation enables an interrogation of the role that museums and archives play in instructing citizens what to remember, and in the case of September 11th how to mourn both an idealized citizen and an innocent past. This chapter explains: (1) the origins and guiding principles of the Smithsonian Institution, (2) the importance of acquisition files to archival analysis, (3) the debate and eventual implementation of "disaster methods of collection," and (4) the significance and impact of the materials collected in shaping

national identity, particularly the way in which notions of whiteness are employed to create identification with the victims of September 11th as emblematic of the national imaginary. In the end, the September 11th collection functions as a memorial to the lives lost by working to create emotional connections between the objects with supporting archival materials and the viewer. This strong emotional connection effectively centers the victims in the national imaginary while larger political and historical issues become pushed to the margins and perhaps forgotten.

Chapter Four: A Second Disaster Collection - Hurricane Katrina

Chapter four continues the investigation of disaster collecting at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History with the institution's second disaster collection – Hurricane Katrina. In this chapter, I explain the development of the Hurricane Katrina collection with special attention to important differences in collecting goals and materials collected as compared to the September 11th Collection. Among these key differences are: the level of organization and categorization, the use of photography, and the amount of personal information related to the objects that were collected.

One of the most striking qualities of the Hurricane Katrina collection was that it was unorganized and incomplete; in fact, it took NMAH staff two months to locate where the acquisition files were located. A second defining quality of the Hurricane Katrina collection has to do with its use of photography, as it marks the first time in museum history that a professional photographer was sent to accompany the curator

charged with collecting the disaster artifacts. The rationale behind this decision was that the photographs would “capture the context in which objects are found before they are recovered, and will survey aspects of Katrina that defy object acquisition.”⁸⁸ While these photographs do work to give some context to the sheer devastation inflicted by levee breaks, there is a striking absence in the acquisition files, which was actually glaringly present in the September 11th collection. The September 11th collection had extensive documentation of personal documents relating to each object the museum collected. However, materials documenting personal stories relating to the collected objects are absent from the Hurricane Katrina files and seemingly replaced with photographs. Consequently, while the new disaster collecting methods implemented in the September 11th collection produced a memorial where both the victims and the heroes were figured as white and were highly individualized, thereby encouraging the viewer to identify with the victims as national heroes that required respectful mourning, the similar methods led to a different outcome with the Hurricane Katrina collection. In the Katrina collection, the devastation of the environment and city was privileged at the expense of any significant individualization of the victims, thereby distancing the victims of Hurricane Katrina from the national belonging.

Chapter Five: Archive of the Future: The September 11 Digital Archive

⁸⁸ Hurricane Katrina Curator, email message to museum staff concerning upcoming trip to Gulf Coast, September 19, 2005.

The dawning of the 21st Century brought forth an Internet that was not merely used for retrieving information, but also a virtual space for multidirectional communications in the form of blogs, personal and group websites that invited public feedback, social networking sites, and round-robin emails. These spaces and types of new communication created a way in which to instantaneously capture people's impressions and feelings relating to these two events to an extent that was never before imagined. The possibility of immediately capturing people's thoughts and expressions from anywhere in the world led to the creation of Internet archives. Chapter five investigates the birth, implementation, organization, and content of one of the first major instances of creating a digital archive of digital material - the September 11 Digital Archive – created in collaboration with George Mason University's Center for History and New Media and funded by the Sloan Foundation.

The unique qualities of digital archiving allow for the collection of all digital material submitted to the site, which consisted of “artifacts like email, digital photographs, word processing documents, and personal narratives.”⁸⁹ The September 11 Digital Archive used this function to collect over 150,000 digital objects, leading many to herald it a major success. The vast majority of these objects are individual submissions from those living outside New York City and Washington, D.C. These submissions reveal the influence of the media and government interpretations in shaping dominant narratives concerning September 11, 2001. The individual contributions demonstrated the ways in which September 11th was positioned as a

⁸⁹ Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*.

national tragedy so that where those indirectly involved were nonetheless interpellated to feel a part of the tragedy by directly identifying with the “Americanness” (i.e. whiteness) of the victims. Therefore, through their submissions, these individuals help to (re)produce these notions of national belonging in the space of digital archives, preserved for posterity.

Chapter Six – Collecting Instant History: The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank

Three years after the September 11 Digital Archive ended the active collection phase of their project, another disaster rocked the coast of a different part of the United States. The Sloan Foundation again funded the CHNM, this time partnering with affiliates at the University of New Orleans to create a digital archive relating to Hurricane Katrina and Rita – the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (HDMB). However, similar collection methods yielded a significantly diminished return – only 25,000 submissions as compared to the September 11 Digital Archives’ 150,000. Chapter six chronicles the emergence of the HDMB and analyzes its resulting structure and content in relation to the September 11 Digital Archive in order to assess the impact of digital disaster collection methods on the first two instances of their use, while also analyzing the mechanisms involved in the production and policing of national belonging within the archives.

The bulk of the material submitted to the September 11 Digital Archive represents stories and emails from indirect witnesses, in other words those individuals who were not in New York City or Washington, D.C. or related to the victims, but

rather watched the events unfold on the television from the comfort of their own homes. The result is an outpouring of emotional messages including shock, horror, fear, sadness, and prayers for the victims. On the other hand, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank contains material almost exclusively from those who directly experienced the storms - those who stayed during the initial onslaught and those who evacuated before the storms. This stark difference in content, again, demonstrates the impact of the media's framing of these two events, which becomes reflected and reproduced in the archives, thereby uncovering a powerful affective element of archives that is largely ignored within archival studies, but is central in the production of national identity. The thousands of indirect contributions to the September 11 Digital Archive reveal the ways in which September 11th was positioned as a national tragedy perpetrated by foreign enemy-terrorists bent on destroying the "American way of life," where those indirectly involved were nonetheless interpellated to feel a part of the tragedy by directly identifying with the "Americanness" of the victims. Whereas, the absence of any response from indirect witnesses in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank demonstrates how Hurricane Katrina failed to be positioned as national tragedy by distancing the victims from ideas of "Americanness," largely due to the media's framing of them as 'refugees' – a highly racialized and classed category that constitutes the antithesis of citizens.

Conclusion: 'Recognizing' the Power of Archives

By reading the birth of disaster archives in both the physical and digital realms relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina, this dissertation demonstrates the role that affect plays in archival construction and content. It is the emotional connections that are forged in the space of archives, rather than merely objective and neutral accounts of the past, that powerfully produce notions of national belonging that rely on the construction of strict boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, the disaster archives relating to September 11th and Hurricane Katrina reveal the interrelated roles that race, gender, and sexuality play in these processes of producing notions of national belonging. The consequences of the structure and content of these archives are far-reaching, because, as Blouin and Rosenberg explain, “the archive itself is not simply a reflection or an image of an event but also shapes the event, the phenomena of its origins.”⁹⁰ In other words, the content and structure of these two archives effectively create enduring cultural memories of the two events, wherein these subtle but pervasive forms of racism become distinctly embedded for future preservation.

⁹⁰ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, 2.

Chapter Two: Archival Power and the Nation-State

Introduction:

In order to understand the significant impact that the birth of disaster collecting has had on the field of historical preservation, the origins of the archive and its accompanying public face, the museum, must be thoroughly analyzed. Therefore, this chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the analysis to follow throughout the dissertation. As explained in the previous chapter, this project is grounded in questions at the heart of political science, such as those relating to citizenship, nationalism, and national belonging. While these questions have motivated the discipline since its inception, the archive as a crucial site for the contestation and construction of these concepts has largely been ignored. Moreover, race as an intersectional and ordering principle in political analyses has been relegated to the margins of the discipline.⁹¹ In order to correct these absences within the field of political science, this project draws on theories from feminist studies, memory studies, and postcolonial studies to create an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that allows for an ethnography of disaster archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, the following chapter proceeds with an analysis of: (1) the origins of archives and its partnered institution, the museum, (2) the centrality of

⁹¹ Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren, “New Orleans Is Not the Exception”. For some of the important studies within political science that do center race in their analysis see: Reed, Jr, *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought*; Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*; Mink, *Welfare’s End*; Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race*; Bobo, “Unmasking Race, Poverty, and Politics in the 21st Century”; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo, *Racialized Politics*; Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma*; Kim, *Bitter Fruit*.

archives and museums to nation-building projects, (3) the power archives possess to structure knowledge (4) the interpretative role archivists play in the collection, organization, and retrieval of archival material, and (5) the ways in which new digital technologies both disrupt and reaffirm the powerful structures of archives.

The Origins of Archives and Museums

The birth of the modern concept of the archive emerged alongside the Western European nation-state, together with its quest for empire and colonial domination. The archive served two important functions for the emerging nation-state. The first function dealt with housing newly acquired information on both the state's domestic population, as well as its colonial subjects. Mike Featherstone explains, "The growth of population in the 18th century was accompanied by the growth of disciplinary power, both in the sense of emergence of new disciplines to record and analyze the characteristics of populations...along with the sites and institutional complexes in which this knowledge was applied to discipline and normalize bodies."⁹² These institutions included schools, prisons, museums, and archives, among many others. With this data collection and its storage in archives, the state was able to simultaneously gather "systematic and measurable information" on its population and territory, and actually create the "the individual as a category of knowledge through the accumulated case records (the file) which documented individual life histories."⁹³

⁹² Featherstone, "Archive," 591.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 591–2.

The state also used this newly collected information on its population to legitimate its existence and generate the notion of an inherent commonality among the population, the second important function of the archive for the nation-state.

As nation-states in Western Europe consolidated in the 19th Century, so did the discipline of history. Key figures such as Ranke and Michelet promoted the idea that careful research and methods could be used to analyze documents, in order to “tell history as it was,” thereby producing a scientific quality to the discipline of history enabling it to create objective and accurate accounts of the past.⁹⁴ Barbara Misztal explains, “In the nineteenth century, historians attempted to advance history as an autonomous discipline by promoting the application of scientific methods...The growing processes of the institutionalization and the professionalization of history also created a new distance from the past.”⁹⁵ This distance from the past occupied by historians required them to rely on written records to extract traces or ‘evidence’ of the past. Kerwin Lee Klien also describes this process, “When historians began professionalizing in the nineteenth century, they commonly identified memories as a dubious source for the verification of historical facts. Written documents seemed less amenable to distortion and thus preferable to memories.”⁹⁶ Through its scientific methods of distance in time and relation, together with a citational system that proved credible evidence through a process of verification, History achieved a position of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 592.

⁹⁵ Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 100.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

supposed objectivity.⁹⁷ Moreover, this methodology of History tended to focus on so-called “great events” and “great men”, thereby either erasing the many rich histories of communities and cultures that were not related to elite, white power-holders or rather, in the case of colonial histories, using communities in colonized regions as objects of inquiry in the great Western history of progression.

The new historical weight given to documents constructed the archive as a sacred storehouse for national memory and history. However, as these archives contained important state documents, many governmental officials were concerned about the potentially dangerous ends for which such documents could be used. This concern was assuaged through the organization and management of the archive itself. In an interesting study of the founding of the Musée de l’Histoire de France, at the Imperial Archives of France, under the direction of Leon de Laborde during the mid-19th century, Jennifer Milligan demonstrates how the state was able to create a sense of national heritage and history by actually encouraging the public to play a direct, yet specifically defined, role in the process. Laborde’s most enduring legacy, which came to serve as a founding principle of archival theory, was that the archive must be open to the public. This seemingly democratic principle was based on Laborde’s strongly held belief in “the power of history based on documents to create a national

⁹⁷ In *Theories of Social Remembering*, Barbara Misztal provides a brief historiography of the history discipline, noting that before the 19th Century, memory was actually the primary modality for acquiring history. She explains, “Until the nineteenth century, history traditionally told stories which relied on memories and it was assumed that ‘memory reflects what actually happened, and history reflects memory’ (Burke 1989: 97)” (100). It is quite interesting that contemporary understandings of the history discipline tend to forget the once centrality of memory to the field of history.

community that had thus far been impossible to construct through politics.”⁹⁸ However, like many of his time, Laborde was also afraid of the uncivilized and uneducated masses. Therefore, while educated scholars in the burgeoning field of history were allowed to examine the holdings of the archive, the access given to the general public was significantly limited for expressed national purposes. In order to achieve this feat, Laborde created a museum, as an institution of public instruction, within the archive to specifically “focus public attention on the riches the Archives contained, away from the scholarly reading room.”⁹⁹ By putting key state documents on display, Laborde was able to create a sense of governmental transparency that directly coincided with the principles of the revolution. In reality, through a carefully controlled environment and orchestrated exhibition, Laborde was able to “limit the possible objects and tame and channel the impulse for forbidden knowledge and desire into a healthy respect and attachment to the history of “our France.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, Milligan concludes, “the Museum, in this formulation, distracted curiosity from the potentially interesting and dangerous Archive, but presented itself as all that the Archives had to offer—the truth of history.”¹⁰¹

As Milligan’s study demonstrates, the museum emerged alongside the archive as a public space to civilize the population and cultivate national pride through the display of objects and archival material. Therefore, the power of the archive cannot be understood without a close analysis of its interrelation with the museum. Most

⁹⁸ Milligan, “Curious Archives,” 362.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 363–4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

accounts of the birth of the museum tie their modern form to the emergence of cabinets of curiosity in the Sixteenth Century.¹⁰² Within these cabinets of curiosity, objects were collected and displayed “on the basis of their uniqueness or their status as anomalies.”¹⁰³ The curiosity cabinets were generally owned by elite men, who could demonstrate their ability to travel through the display of their curious and exotic objects, where “knowledge and ostentation are bound together.”¹⁰⁴ Michelle Henning argues that the “curiosity collections may be understood as an attempt to manage the unintelligibility of the strange and exotic, and the emotions such things aroused.”¹⁰⁵ It is important to underscore that these curiosity cabinets were highly elitist spaces, where the general public was far from welcome. Tony Bennett explains that while such collections “fulfilled a variety of functions (demonstrations of royal power, symbols of aristocratic or mercantile status, instruments of learning), they all constituted socially enclosed spaces to which access was remarkably restricted...So much so that, in the most extreme cases, access was available to only one person: the prince.”¹⁰⁶ However, the birth of nation-states and a shift in the understanding of how knowledge was accrued significantly altered this situation as cabinets of curiosity became public museums used for educating the masses about democracy and ‘civilized’ manners.

¹⁰² Benedict, *Curiosity*; Harrison, “Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England”; Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*.

¹⁰³ Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, “The Political Rationality of the Museum.”

Civilizing Subjects through National Memories

In an edited volume on the history of the idea of the museum, Preziosi and Farago explain that the concept of a national culture was born in the public museum of the Nineteenth Century in Western Europe, where “public museums were formed on the basis of royal and aristocratic private collections and furnishings in order to fashion citizens in new nation-state formations.”¹⁰⁷ Michelle Henning argues that this process of transferring curious objects from individual possessions to national treasures was the result of the process of democratization, which “involved a redistribution of wealth and, importantly, of access to knowledge. It also involved the dissemination of the ideals of democracy. The ‘treasure’ which found its way into the public museums of Europe and the New World became a means of communicating democratic ideals...Thus the democratization of treasure was also about the transformation of a people into a democratic citizenry.”¹⁰⁸ Embedded within this process of democratization was a new relationship with the past in which “European colonial relations enabled colonial powers to view their own culture as both universally valid and as the peak of civilization. Other cultures were discussed, sampled, represented in encyclopedias, periodicals, and in popular displays as well as in the public museums.”¹⁰⁹ Hooper-Greenhill echoes this sentiment, “Through the bringing together and displaying of material things which had been violently taken away from their previous religious, aristocratic, royal and enemy owners, a space was

¹⁰⁷ Preziosi and Farago, *Grasping the World*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

constituted where new values of liberty, freedom, fraternity and equality among citizens of the State could be both produced and reproduced.”¹¹⁰

Henning notes that together with introducing the public to these new national values, public museums also “attempted to turn the working class into a manageable and civilized ‘public’ by encouraging self-regulation and self-monitoring.”¹¹¹ This ‘civilizing project’ was enacted by targeting “the popular body as an object for reform, doing so through a variety of routines and technologies requiring a shift in the norms of bodily comportment.”¹¹² The “primary-target” for this civilizing project was working-class men.¹¹³ These patrons were formally given free access to the museum, but such access came with strict proscriptions on behavior, “for example, rules forbidding eating and drinking, outlawing the touching of exhibits and, quite frequently, stating - or at least advising - what should be worn and what should not.”¹¹⁴ Bennett sees this disciplinary process as occurring not through the implementation of “an alien and coercive principle of power which aimed to cow the people into submission, [rather] the museum - addressing the people as a public, as citizens - aimed to inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own.”¹¹⁵ He further explains, “the purpose, here, is not to know the populace but to allow the people, addressed as subjects of knowledge rather than as objects of administration, to

¹¹⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, “The Space of the Museum.”

¹¹¹ Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, 13. Here Henning is directly reference Bennett, 1995.

¹¹² Bennett, “The Political Rationality of the Museum.”

¹¹³ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 31–2.

¹¹⁴ Bennett, “The Political Rationality of the Museum.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

know; not to render the populace visible to power but to render power visible to the people and, at the same time, to represent to them that power as their own.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, Henning argues that this unique form of power was achieved “not through an attentiveness to the diversity of their audience, but instead by universalizing socially and culturally particular experiences, judgments and relationships.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, by appealing to a universalized form of citizenship through the depiction of a righteous history that was uniquely their own, museums helped to instruct visitors how and what to remember. As critical art historian Carol Duncan explains, museums have been “instrumental in the construction of concepts of nationhood, encouraging the patriotic feeling necessary to the projects of imperialism and colonialism.”¹¹⁸

Given museums’ and archives’ function in promoting subject formation and self-discipline, it becomes easy to see their relationship to larger projects of nation-building. While not directly analyzing the museum or the archive, a number of important studies within nationalism studies, a subfield of political science, demonstrate the centrality of both written materials and objects in the construction of a seemingly cohesive and naturalized nation-state. Following other theorists (Gellner,¹¹⁹ Anderson,¹²⁰ Hobsbawm,¹²¹), I view the nation-state as a modern creation,

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, 109.

¹¹⁸ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*. – quoted in Henning, 39.

¹¹⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

¹²⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹²¹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*.

with its major roots in the early modern period.¹²² However, this dissertation will avoid the lengthy and seemingly endless debate that fuels many studies in this field concerning whether the nation as a common sentiment among people emerged first, thus necessitating the common governmental apparatus of the state (Anderson,¹²³ Kedourie¹²⁴) or, on the other hand, if elites worked to create national sentiment in order to preserve their power in the form of a state (Hobsbawn, Mann;¹²⁵ Giddens¹²⁶) or to keep up with capitalist needs (Gellner;¹²⁷ Narin;¹²⁸ Hechter¹²⁹). I, however, side with a more complex and integrated approach as explained by Hutchinson and Smith, “Mass nations are not simply forged by elites...they are created through a complex interplay between rival elites and other strata of the designated population, and elites are constrained by the beliefs and traditions of the ‘the masses’ (the other strata) whom they wish to mobilize and whose culture they usually share.”¹³⁰ This complex interplay of actors in the nation-building process is clearly evidenced in the space of archives and museums.

In Benedict Anderson’s well-known book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he argues that printed materials in vernacular languages, especially the newspaper and the book (materials that were increasingly stored in national archives), helped to create the idea of a common,

¹²² Of course there is a major debate as to whether to date the initial emergence of national sentiment to the Enlightenment (Anderson) or the Medieval Period (Marx and Smith).

¹²³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹²⁴ Kedourie, *Nationalism*.

¹²⁵ Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. 2*.

¹²⁶ Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*.

¹²⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

¹²⁸ Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*.

¹²⁹ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*.

¹³⁰ Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*, xxxvi.

“imagined political community...imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” among the citizens of nation-state.¹³¹ This imagined community was instrumental in creating a sense of connection among people in distant areas who would never know, let alone, meet one another. This concept of the imagination of the nation is a key feature in national archives and museums, as viewers are made to see themselves in the national memories presented there. Anderson acknowledges this powerful role of museums, noting “museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political.”¹³² Additionally, Anderson notes that the emergence of national imagination is not completely organic as state elites can also play a role in its cultivation. He explains, “so often in the nation-building policies of the new states one sees both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm, and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth.”¹³³ Hobsbawm and Ranger, on the other hand, are quite a bit more skeptical of even the existence of genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm.

In *The Invention of Traditions*, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that the state played a more direct role in crafting traditions.¹³⁴ They argue, “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.”¹³⁵ These “invented traditions” play a significant role in generating a sense of commonality in terms of customs and histories among an otherwise diverse

¹³¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹³² Anderson, “Census, Map, Museum,” 252.

¹³³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 113–4.

¹³⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 375.

population. Therefore, “invented traditions” are “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the historic past.”¹³⁶ However, Hobsbawm and Ranger are quick to note that this continuity is “largely factious.”¹³⁷ Therefore, the state is careful to hide the origins of national traditions by emphasizing their historical nature. This tradition then works to create the image of a cohesive, historic national population – a tradition so close to the hearts of the citizens of the nation-state that they would be willing to give their lives to defend it.¹³⁸

Of course, the United States presents a seeming contradiction to Hobsbawm and Ranger’s thesis as the state and other dominant elites constantly make reference to the nation’s origins and the beginning of national traditions. In fact, there is a tendency within nationalism studies to ignore the peculiar conditions of the United States in the origins debate.¹³⁹ Susan-Mary Grant explains the reason behind this omission has to do with the fact that “America is a ‘nation of immigrants’, and therefore clearly lacks the ethnic homogeneity that sustains many modern European nations.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it cannot refer to old traditions that naturalize the existence of the nation. However, it is this founding myth – America as a ‘nation of immigrants’ that becomes the invented tradition, or again to reference Taylor, a ‘scenario’. Within

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 376.

¹³⁸ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 90–1.

¹³⁹ Grant, “When Is a Nation Not a Nation? The Crisis of American Nationality in the Mid-nineteenth Century.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1189.

this ‘scenario-thinking,’ the United States is founded with a divine mandate to become a new nation of equality and freedom, directing the rest of the world to their democratic order. Consequently, the liberal ideas of freedom, liberty, and equality are given a sacred aura, effectively clouding their profoundly unequal foundation.¹⁴¹

Within such an understanding, the violence and inequality imposed through the “removal”¹⁴² of Native Americans, slavery, and the discrimination and disenfranchisement of all but land-owning, white males is brushed aside in favor of a grand narrative of progress driven by the divinely-inspired liberal ideas. Frymer, et.al. explain that within this paradigm, racial inequalities are seen as “products of vestigial and irrational prejudices antithetical to the authentic and fundamental tendencies of the American creed of liberalism.”¹⁴³ Because of the assumed universal and equal applicability of these liberal principles to all citizens, the exclusionary function of race, gender, class, and sexuality from these “universal” freedoms, rights, and privileges becomes erased.¹⁴⁴ As Macarena Gomez-Barris explains, “Like

¹⁴¹ Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*; Greenfeld, *Nationalism*.

¹⁴² I highlight this word to underscore the banal name given to a violent process of genocide.

¹⁴³ Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren, “New Orleans Is Not the Exception,” 39. Importantly, Frymer, et. al. explain that this paradigm is largely supported wholesale through the field of political science, which fails to analyze the inequalities embedded within the liberal conceptions themselves.

¹⁴⁴ Another important field of inquiry within political science is the study of citizenship theories. This subfield is so extensive that an adequate review of the literature is outside the scope of this dissertation project. However, a very general sketch of the literature usually reveals three main branches of thought. The first branch derives the idea of citizenship from Ancient Greece, where citizenship was conceived as an obligation. Here studies usually focus on civic duty and participation. The second line of thought is more directly connected with the above mentioned liberal principles. Here contract theorists, such as Hobbes and Locke, are relied on to explain that an individual enters into a contract with state so that it guarantees *him* certain inalienable rights as a citizen. The third branch largely critiques the previous two by noting the social and exclusionary principles upon which such conceptions are based. In other words, some individuals regardless of their rights and/or exercise of civic duty are denied full access to the rights, freedoms, and privileges of the state based on some aspect of their social standing. This conception is generally traced to T.H. Marshall’s conception of social rights, and has been used by many feminists and critical race theorists to underscore the

memory itself, the nation-state functions through the process of selection and also through a series of exclusions.”¹⁴⁵ One of the central principles of exclusion centers on determining who is allowed citizenship status. As Giorgio Agamben¹⁴⁶ highlights, “the nation-state’s sovereignty is instantiated through the citizen-subject, which at birth replaces the attribute of human as the primary condition of being.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, “citizen becomes a quintessential locator for national subjects and legal processes that emerge with the ‘birth of the nation,’ which forcefully produce hierarchies between social groups” that “structure subject’s ability to belong.”¹⁴⁸ Consequently, the reliance on liberal notions of citizenship denies the exclusionary practices and the fact that “racism is embedded in political institutions, ideologies, [and] more complex social relations that sustain hierarchies and inequalities.”¹⁴⁹

As the following chapters explore, this scenario is reactivated by both September 11th and Hurricane Katrina disaster events to emphasize that the United States is a “color-blind” society as a result of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. In *The Racial Order of Things*, Mukherjee explains, within the rhetoric of “color blindness, the mythic meritocracy, and the striving individual” that defines the contours of the contemporary instantiation of this scenario-thinking, “we find that

profoundly unequal structures within society that prevent a true universal applicability of such citizenship theories.

See: Marshall and Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class*; Oliver and Heater, *The Foundations of Citizenship*; Held, *Models of Democracy, 3rd Edition*; Gardner, “What Lawyers Mean by Citizenship”; Lister, *Citizenship*; Butler and Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*; Alexander, “Not Just (any) Body Can Be a Citizen”; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries*; Luibhéid, *Queer Migrations*; Mills, *The Racial Contract*; Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.

¹⁴⁵ Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Agamben, *Means Without End*.

¹⁴⁷ As quoted in Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

¹⁴⁹ Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren, “New Orleans Is Not the Exception,” 40.

race and racial differentiation reappear at each turn. This is not the state ‘going color-blind.’ Rather, these neoliberal imperatives shore up the rationality of governmentalized protocols of state racisms (M.Hill 2003; Omi and Winant 1994; Stoler 1995) and ensure the continuing significance of race in the internalized discipline or, properly, the control of subjects.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the unequal realities of this “color-blind” society must be erased to allow for the continued function of the mythical American founding principles. It is precisely this interplay of remembering and forgetting that forms the heart of the political power of archives and museums.

This genealogy of the origins of archives and their interrelationship with museums, demonstrates the central role archives have played in the cultivation of the nation-state. As the previous literature indicates, archives have been instrumental in consolidating the legitimacy of the nation-state by creating a sense of a common community and tradition through collected documents and objects. Moreover, the museum, as a public space, has worked to fashion citizens by instructing them about their patriotic duty by displaying what is worthy of remembering, and what is not. This dissertation adds an important layer to this field of study by dissecting the specific practices of the contemporary archive and its new methods of disaster collecting, in order to demonstrate that it is not only the museum display that instructs the population in patriotic duty. Rather the archive itself also produces national subjects through its internal practices of collection, organization, and now public contribution in newly created digital realm of archives. This process of producing

¹⁵⁰ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 8.

national subjects hinges on drawing strict, racialized boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, through the rigid collection and organizational procedures created to protect the supposed authenticity and objectivity of the archive.

Archival Construction and the Power to “Impose the Law”

Well-known historian, David Lowenthal explains that “during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archival records came to be valued as reliable repositories of truth, seedbeds of unabridged and veracious history. Open to inspection by all and preserved for all time, archives promised an authentic, untampered-with past.”¹⁵¹ While Milligan demonstrates that the actual openness of archives were effectively restricted through elaborate, orchestrated museum exhibits, the idea that the materials would provide access to an “untampered-with past” pervaded the archive; in fact it was this idea that created the fear of an unruly, curious public who might use the documents for undesired ends. Such an understanding of archives as sacred palaces of an authentic past has been cultivated through the existence of two related elements, the archivist as the guardian of the past and the scientific procedures that he (a consciously selected pronoun) was sworn to uphold in order to protect the objectivity of the archive.

The original understanding of the role of the archivist was that he was a guardian of the past who would preserve past materials in their original format without any intervention. This guardianship was exercised through strict allegiance

¹⁵¹ Lowenthal, “Archives, Heritage, and History,” 193.

to rigidly established principles of collection, organization, and access. Adherence to these principles would create necessary distance from personal desires and opinions by insulating the archivist from the realm of interpretation, for that was the job of historians. Tom Nesmith explains,

Archivists not only attempt to acquire primary (or original) sources, or records, which are thus thought to have special (even unique) integrity as means of access to the past; they believe that providing information about the records' origin and respecting the original order of their creation are essential to ensure that archiving is a neutral means of communication of the recorded past...In this role, archivists simply document or mirror the world around the archives, and list, describe, copy, and retrieve the records and, thereby, the knowledge already in them in a neutral, inconspicuous, and simply factual way.¹⁵²

However, a number of scholars, especially within the fields of feminist studies and postcolonial studies, have worked to open this process of archival construction to critical investigation. The work of Jacques Derrida has been centrally important to this effort.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida works to archive the concept of the archive. He famously elucidates the two major principles of the archive: “the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle.”¹⁵³ This second principle is of central importance for Derrida. He refers to these gods and men who command the archives as *archons*, which he derives from the Greek *arkheion*. He explains, “The

¹⁵² Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 27.

¹⁵³ Derrida, “Archive Fever,” 9.

archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law.”¹⁵⁴ Louise Craven explains the importance of Derrida’s analysis, “One of [his] major contributions to the philosophy of archives is, of course about meaning. It was in this context that Derrida described what it is that the archivist actually *does*; the archivist’s defining role lies in the relationship to context and the creation of meaning. ‘Context gives the archivist credibility.’ The archivist also gives title and order: ‘...there could be no archive without titles...and without the criteria of classification...of hierarchization...of order’ (Derrida 1996, 4).”¹⁵⁵

By emphasizing the very real power that archivists exercise through the power of interpretation, Derrida builds on Michel Foucault’s analysis of the archive in *Archaeology of Knowledge*.¹⁵⁶ Foucault argues that the archive is more than a simple institution or an empirical concept, but rather “‘the law of what can be said,’ not a library of events, but ‘that system that establishes statements as events and things,’ that ‘system of their enunciabilities.’”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the archive is “expressive of the historical a priori of thought in a culture; ‘the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events...it is that which differentiates discourses in their

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁵ Craven, *What Are Archives?*, 14.

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*.

¹⁵⁷ As quoted in Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 12.

multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration' (Foucault, 1972: 129)."¹⁵⁸ Acknowledging Derrida's extension of Foucault's analysis, Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy conclude, "Unlike Foucault's archive of the law as 'what can be said' (that is, the law as an anonymous, indeed transhuman, discursive formation), Derrida's archive involves actual archons who 'exercise social order' not discursively but hermeneutically through the interpretation of texts."¹⁵⁹ Moreover, as Carolyn Steedman explains, the obsessive desire, or fever, to know the archive which is the focus of Derrida's study, has to do "with its very establishment, which is the establishment of state power and authority. And then there is the feverish desire – a kind of sickness unto death – that Derrida indicated for the archive: the fever not so much to enter it and use it as to have it."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, those who create and interpret the archive hold immense power not only in constituting the past, but also in producing the law of what is to be understood in the present.

A number of critical feminist scholars have also built on Derrida's analysis by interrogating the gendered dimensions of power that the archons exercise. Tanya Fitzgerald explains "The archons that Derrida speaks about are essentially patriarchal figures that make decisions about what 'counts' as an archive and what archives 'count'. I would like to add further to this and suggest we must also interrogate the archive to determine 'who counts as a historical subject', 'where are archives housed', 'who is in possession of the archive' and 'who lays claim to the knowledge

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, "The Ordinarity of the Archive," 53.

¹⁵⁹ Shetty and Bellamy, "Postcolonialism's Archive Fever," 28.

¹⁶⁰ Steedman, "Something She Called a Fever," 1159.

produced and re-produced by archives.”¹⁶¹ Shetty and Bellamy take up this call by employing feminist postcolonial theories of power in the study of archives.¹⁶² They call for a revisiting of Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, which they argue has largely been incorrectly interpreted and only superficially read. They work to read Spivak’s work in relation to Derrida’s *Archive Fever* by posing the question of whether it may be possible to create a postcolonial archive. More specifically, they ask, “Can we approach the gendered subaltern more productively if our project is to recover not ‘lost voices’ but rather lost texts?”¹⁶³ Throughout their essay they subtly answer this question affirmatively by viewing the postcolonial archive more as method of analysis and interrogation than as a structure. They explain, “The ‘postcolonial archive,’ then, is a task of ‘measuring silences,’ a task, in Spivak’s words, of ‘attempting to recover a (sexually) subaltern subject [...] lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin’ (303).”¹⁶⁴

The issue of sexuality that Shetty and Bellamy bring to light in their careful attention to Spivak’s call for “recovering a sexually subaltern subject” in postcolonial archives is a subject that is often ignored in archival studies, but plays a central role in the production of national subjects. Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* directly addresses sexuality in the archive by working against the silences and overt homophobia within traditional

¹⁶¹ Fitzgerald, “Archives of Memory and Memories of Archive,” 23.

¹⁶² Arondekar, *For the Record*; McEwan, “Building a Postcolonial Archive?”; Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance.”

¹⁶³ Shetty and Bellamy, “Postcolonialism’s Archive Fever,” 25.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

archives by centering gay and lesbian archives in her study.¹⁶⁵ She explains that the fact that “gay and lesbian history even exists has been a contested fact, and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, like other critical feminists, Cvetkovich calls attention to the need to analyze what gets counted as historical ‘evidence’ worthy of collection.

Many feminists have drawn attention to the divide between public and private material in which written documents provide legitimate proof, worthy of preservation, whereas material relating to the home, the private sphere, are subservient memories presented as dubious in credibility. Citing this gendered binary, Fitzgerald argues for the creation of counter archives that recognize the importance of what has been deemed the private sphere, in other words, “artifacts such as house and home as the carriers of memories and the written material about life with/in house and home as material evidence of the gendered boundaries and experiences of domestic and family life.”¹⁶⁷ Cvetkovich also notes the gendered dimensions of material collection by highlighting an important area of archival material that often gets subordinated to more ‘official’ materials such as government and elite publication within archives: ephemera materials. Cvetkovich explains, “The stock in trade of the gay and lesbian archive is *ephemera*, the term used by archivists and librarians to describe occasional publications and paper documents, material objects, or items that fall into the

¹⁶⁵ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*; Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings.”

¹⁶⁶ Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings,” 110.

¹⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, “Archives of Memory and Memories of Archive,” 12.

miscellaneous category when catalogued.”¹⁶⁸ In traditional archives, ephemera material often remains un-catalogued, because it is seen as fleeting material that may not be of long-term historical significance. Therefore, it often remains clumped together in large boxes making it difficult to research. However, taking the merits of ephemera material seriously and analyzing how this material gets assigned such a status, as opposed to ‘official’, works to unmask the relations of power involved in archival construction.

In Cvetkovich’s analysis of gay and lesbian archives, she argues that “lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism, all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive.”¹⁶⁹ This radical archive of emotion demonstrates “the profoundly affective power of a useful archive...which must preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling.”¹⁷⁰ With her analysis, she brings the study of affect to archival investigations, which she sees as not only demanding the inclusion of new kinds of evidence, “but also requires that we think about evidence as an emotional category.”¹⁷¹

Cvetkovich’s conclusion that evidence must also be thought of as an emotional category, together with her emphasis on ephemera material is of immense importance to understanding the affective power of the materials in the archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. While Cvetkovich sees that

¹⁶⁸ Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings,” 111.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109–10.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

the emotional aspect of evidence has been largely ignored within the collection of material for traditional archives, I argue that disaster archives actually center emotion through the foregrounding of ephemera material within their collections. Because of the unique characteristics of disaster collecting, which entailed the immediate collection of physical material before it was removed as debris and the digital collection of digital materials such as emails, digital photographs, and digital art, curators actually collected a significant amount of material that would normally be classified as ephemera. The collection of ephemera material was justified because it evidenced the degree of shock provoked by the disasters. In other words, notes or photographs from victims immediately before the disasters represent the potential and “normal” lives that the victims once had and anticipate the disaster to come. As this material evidences the denial of such life possibilities, they hold enormous emotional weight within them. Moreover, the ways in which this material forges such emotional connections relates to how one is interpellated to read and connect with the people centered in the collections, thereby shaping conceptions of national belonging.

Each of the subsequent chapters will directly take up this emotional component of the archives and its impact on national subject formation. However, in order to understand the ways in which emotion is central to disaster archives’ construction and organization, the actual steps involved in archival production must be thoroughly analyzed. Such an analysis must also unpack the precise assumptions embedded within these procedures that create the appearance of objectivity, but actually reveal the power of *archons* to “impose the law” of what can be known.

Such an analysis draws attention to three important steps in archival production: (1) selection, (2) organization, and (3) retrieval.

The Power of Archival Procedures

The first step in constructing an archive involves the collection of significant material, or what archivists call object appraisal. Before the birth of digital archives (which present their own set of issues relating to power which is discussed below), archivists were charged with only collecting “significant” material. Because of finite resources, particularly space and funds, archivists were forced to be highly selective in their assessment of which materials earned the status of “significant,” and therefore worthy of historical preservation. In fact, only one to two percent of all information is actually housed in archives.¹⁷² There is significant ambiguity within the archival field concerning exactly how to determine an object’s “significance,”¹⁷³ other than noting that it should be a “representative sample”¹⁷⁴ or “research worthy.”¹⁷⁵ Such ambiguity was directly uncovered in the disaster collection process, as the following chapter will detail. In the days after September 11th, curators and archivists at the NMAH had to determine instantly what material was worthy of historical preservation, which provoked considerable debate among the staff as different curators had different understandings of exactly which material was “representative” of the larger events. A number of institutional and political factors, including

¹⁷² Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*.

¹⁷³ Cook, “Remembering the Future.”

¹⁷⁴ Lewinson, “Archival Sampling.”

¹⁷⁵ Cook, “‘We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are’.”

Congressional direction of what to collect, ultimately shaped the definition of what constituted “representative material.” Moreover, in order to quell the potentially endless debate over what to collect, one individual curator was assigned to each disaster site (New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania) as the sole determiner of which items to collect – a powerful role, indeed. Therefore, such fuzzy selection terminology opens up enormous space for interpretation, contrary to popular and traditional understandings of archivists as merely “reflecting” the world around them. Tom Nesmith explains the centrality of archivists’ subjectivity in this process of interpretation:

[Archivists’] personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, shape and are shaped by their participation in this process. As they selectively interpret their experience of it, archivists help fashion formative contexts for their work, which influence their understanding of recorded communication and position particular archives to do particular things...It governs their selection of archival material; determines how they describe or represent it to make it intelligible and accessible; prompts their commitment to its indefinite retention and the special measures they take to preserve it over the long term...And, so, as they contextualize their records and work, archivists shape what may be known from archival materials.¹⁷⁶

Therefore, the archivists’ own politics, together with the governing principles of the institutions in which they are employed, have a direct impact on which materials make their way into the archive. Patrick Geary explains that “it is [archivists], through their process of selection, reorganization, and elimination, who largely determine what past can be accessed and, to a great extent, what that past might

¹⁷⁶ Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 30–1.

be.”¹⁷⁷ Amy Tector also demonstrates the incredible power involved in the process of selection. She states,

Selection is as much about what is not taken as what is. Archives “like languages ... are houses of what we recall and what we forget.... What they do not hold, or cannot, is no less important than what they do or can hold. If possession is nine points of the law, then forgetting is nine points of the archives” (Higgins 2003, 8). That is the power of selection: the small fraction of material that makes it to an archive becomes significant simply because it has arrived there.¹⁷⁸

Therefore, as archivists shape the archive through the selection of material, they give meaning to the past by framing what can and cannot be known.

In order to legitimate what seems like an entirely arbitrary selection process, the collected materials are extensively documented noting their origins or provenance and any supporting material associated with them; this is known as the object’s acquisition file. This extensive documentation relating to the object’s provenance, the second major step in archival production supposedly ensures its authenticity. The object then enters a detailed catalogue with its own system of classification and organization. The “positivist and ‘scientific’ values” that permeate this process of categorization create a sense of objectivity.¹⁷⁹ However, Blouin and Rosenberg note, “By assigning the prerogatives of record keeper to the archivist, whose acquisition policies, finding aids, and various institutionalized predilections mediated between scholarship and information, archives produce knowledge, legitimize political

¹⁷⁷ Geary, “Medieval Archivists as Authors: Social Memory and Archival Memory,” 106.

¹⁷⁸ Tector, “The Almost Accidental Archive and Its Impact on Literary Subjects and Canonicity,” 104.

¹⁷⁹ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 173.

systems, and construct identities.”¹⁸⁰ Moreover, these systems of categorization actually privilege and legitimate the nation-state. Terry Cook explains,

Just as much of the early professional history focused on the political, legal, and economic character of the nation-state, so too were the first articulations of archival principles biased in favor of the state...Almost all the classic tomes about archival methodology were written by staff members of national archives. Most focuses on government, public, or corporate records and their orderly transfer to archival repositories to preserve their original order and classification, and most relegated private and personal archives to the purview of libraries and librarians.¹⁸¹

Therefore, as Elisabeth Haskins argues, the effect of this archival system is often to promulgate “official ideologies of the ruling elites while claiming to speak on behalf of the people.”¹⁸²

While each archive is responsible for generating its own system of classification, most systems “derive from the cataloguing systems that emerged with the development of the library in the 19th century. These are systems which favour disciplinary classifications and taxonomies derived from the divisions of the arts and sciences that emerged in early modern times and became refined in the 18th century European Enlightenment which had a preference for binary divisions and branching tree structures.”¹⁸³ Of course, these systems can often hide as much as they reveal through the very process of assigning a single category to each piece of material. Moreover, “inter and trans-disciplinarity and new subject areas” simply do not fit into such systems.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, researchers are “presented with a well-organized,

¹⁸⁰ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, vii.

¹⁸¹ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 172.

¹⁸² Haskins, “Between Archive and Participation,” 402.

¹⁸³ Featherstone, “Archive,” 593.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

rationalized, monolithic view of a record collection that may never have existed that way in operational reality.”¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the object’s methodical categorization is thought to allow easy access to it, and further demonstrate the archivist’s role as a neutral guardian, rather than an interpretative actor.

Once items have been catalogued into the acquisition system, archivists then refigure their categorization method into finding aids designed to help researchers locate desired material, which relates to the last step in archival production – object retrieval. Finding aids function in much the same way as indexes in the backs of text books, where notable subjects are highlighted, and a brief catalogue of their contents, together with their interrelation with other notable subjects are noted. Just as with the material acquisition cataloguing system, the classification of subjects in finding aids holds immense power to make visible certain items in an archive, while hiding others. Elizabeth Yakel explains, “Finding aids are the canonical form of current archival access for researchers. At the same time, they act as collection management tools for archivists...The creation of finding aids, and with it the promise or potential of access, is inherently a political act.”¹⁸⁶ Moreover, she sees two important types of authority embedded within the creation of these finding aids: “For archivists, the finding aid contains authority of data control...For researchers, the presence and placement of the finding aid in the archives is an implicit sign of authority. Additionally, for researchers, the finding aid is the most (although not necessarily a

¹⁸⁵ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 173.

¹⁸⁶ Yakel, “Archival Representation,” 158.

good) authoritative source of knowledge about a collection.”¹⁸⁷ While, as Yakel notes, the finding aid is the authoritative source of knowledge about a collection, it is not the only authority. Because the finding aid only presents a skeletal view of what is contained within the archive, individual archivists are usually charged with becoming experts on particular collections within an archive. Therefore, it is often the case that only one archivist will actually know what is held in a particular collection, making him/her, as many critical scholars have noted, a powerful gatekeeper of knowledge. However, archivists’ traditional roles of cataloguing material and creating finding aids have been disrupted by the emergence of digital technologies to digitize archival holdings and then use search engines capable of searching through every word in every digitized document in the archive. The possibilities and limitations of these new digital technologies are discussed at length below.

In an insightful piece, titled “National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation: Britain and India,” Derba Ghosh also sheds light on how individual archivists not only become powerful gatekeepers of knowledge, but also shape notions of national identity, race, and gender in that process. Ghosh describes how archivists’ ideas of national identity and national belonging affected the materials that they would retrieve for her research on the so-called “golden age” in relations between India and Britain. Within this “golden age” racial hierarchies were thought to be nonexistent because of “the coupling of white men and brown women...observed between Britons and Indians in the late eighteenth century and the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 159.

early nineteenth.”¹⁸⁸ She found that in India, because of ideas of sexuality embedded within traditional Hindu beliefs, “many archivists and librarians denied that native women became sexually involved with European men.”¹⁸⁹ This led archivists to work to try to reframe Ghosh’s research question or to explain that such material relating to her topic did not exist in the archive. On the other hand, British archivists eagerly gave her all possibly related material as they were proud of the coupling of British men with Indian women as this was “often read as a sign of living like a native, participating in local culture to its fullest, and reflecting the most productive (and reproductive) aspects of early Anglo-Indian ‘friendship’.”¹⁹⁰ She explains this stark difference in accessibility as demonstrating the ways in which ideas of national identity and their interrelationship with race, gender, and sexuality affect which research topics are legible in the archive, and which are not.

Ghosh’s account of the ways in which archivists’ own identities and beliefs shaped the type of material they were willing to retrieve for her, highlights the powerful role of object retrieval. It is usually thought that archivists merely play a conduit role between holdings and researcher. Researchers request a particular object, and archivists simply retrieve the desired material. However, as Ghosh’s experience demonstrates, the subjectivity of the archivist plays a significant role in this process, thereby often perpetuating particular ideas of national identity. Moreover, the fact that researchers cannot retrieve the desired materials themselves as

¹⁸⁸ Ghosh, “National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation: Britain and India,” 28.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

they would in a library produces the idea that the material is precious, delicate, and in need of protection. These ideas are reinforced by the many procedures one must complete to actually view archival materials. Researchers are often required to provide extensive identification materials to gain access to the archive. Once inside, they are made to leave personal belongings outside the viewing room, entering with absolutely nothing, and required to use white gloves and special book or document holders to view the requested material. The detailed care, lengthy process, and extensive list of procedures effectively legitimate the idea that archivists are protectors of an authentic and real past, and these materials allow researchers to gain access to “the way it really was.”¹⁹¹

Digitizing Archives

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, archivists are hardly guardians of a neutral untampered-with past, but rather hold immense power at each step in the archival process. Rather, it is the archival procedures in themselves that produce the image that archives are neutral storehouses of past information. However, the birth of the digital era is often thought to reduce the power of archivists, as new digital technologies allow key changes to traditional collection policies, including most notably, the process of material selection and object organization. The following section describes the unique characteristics of digital archives and the challenges they

¹⁹¹ See Kathleen Marquis' chapter in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*. Ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006

pose to established archival theory. This discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of digital archiving is crucially important to understanding the ways in which disaster digital archives collect submissions and simultaneously reflect and reproduce contemporary notions of national identity and national belonging, which is the focus of chapters five and six relating to the September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, respectively.

Because so much information is now exclusively created online, many professionals in the historic preservation field have noted the importance of collecting it as a form of “instant history.” Sheila Brennan and Mills Kelly define ‘instant history’ as “history that was being created and published by thousands of average people in their personal blogs, on photosharing websites, and YouTube...many of which disappear almost as quickly as they are created.”¹⁹² This instant, digital history has the distinctive quality of being a highly vulnerable history, because it constantly faces the possibility of erasure as people clear their inboxes and discard unneeded files. According to this logic, instant history must be collected instantly, which, of course, contradicts the existing archival collection methodology that calls for the passage of time and distance in order to create objectivity. Consequently, many archival scholars caution against creating archives so quickly, despite the knowledge that this ephemeral digital material will be lost without direct efforts to preserve them.

A key feature involved in collecting digital instant history is the ability to collect virtually all material in seemingly unlimited digital storehouses. Rather than

¹⁹² Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

archivists selectively determining what is worthy of collection, the technology used in digital archives has the capacity to collect virtually all materials submitted – a key feature in both the September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. Many have seen this new capability of digital archives, together with the greater access that online digital archives afford as constituting a new and important democratizing force within the field of archival preservation. Haskins explains, “the Internet levels the traditional hierarchy of author-text-audience, thereby distributing authorial agency among various institutions and individuals involved in the production of content and preventing any one agent from imposing narrative and ideological closure upon the data.”¹⁹³ Rosenzweig and Cohen argue, “online accessibility means, moreover, that the documentary record of the past is open to people who rarely had entered before.”¹⁹⁴ While Internet archives certainly open up some archives to many people who previously would not have had access or the power to make direct contributions, issues of access, control, and categorization are still very much present – a point that is often ignored in the literature, but is explored in detail in chapters five and six.

Despite these democratic proclamations, many archival traditionalists have criticized digital archives for the elimination of time-tested methods of assigning legitimacy to material included in archives. Gertrude Himmelfarb staunchly opposes many of the elements of digital collecting, arguing “the Internet does not distinguish between the true and the false, the important and the trivial, the enduring and the

¹⁹³ Haskins, “Between Archive and Participation,” 406–410.

¹⁹⁴ Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*.

ephemeral...Every source appearing on the screen has the same weight and credibility as every other; no authority is 'privileged' over any other."¹⁹⁵ Therefore, for Himmelfarb this instant history is not worthy of collection. Many other scholars share this sentiment regarding the impossibility of determining legitimacy and importance in digital history. Louise Craven explains,

Paper records have a set of 'signs' which we absorb automatically...the outward form of paper records tells us about the significance and authority of the contents within. A book bound in red leather says 'I'm important!', the way documents are folded in a bundle, the format of a pipe roll, the use of treasury tags, ties, and legal pink tape: these are all ways of telling us about the documents before we look at them. Secondly, the archivist's intervention here – putting the documents in order, describing them and producing finding aids – simply reinforces this notion of importance, and gives the user an indication of what to look at and where to start. Signs of conservation are similarly significant: 'ohh, this has been repaired: it must be valuable!'. Electronic records have no such signs, no way of saying 'I'm important!'. Moreover, in the digital context... rearrangement and description by an archivist is unlikely."¹⁹⁶

Barbara Abrash also comments on issues of scholarly rigor involved in digital collection, "evidence that is fragmented, often unattributed, and recombinant raise questions of credibility and historical truth, as well as profoundly challenging conventions of linear narrative."¹⁹⁷ The fact that many traditional archivists are so staunchly opposed to the dismantling of these supposed time-tested methods of assuring legitimacy of collected materials actually reveals the very constructedness of the archives, a fact which has the potential for unraveling the power embedded within the archive.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Craven, *What Are Archives?*, 22.

¹⁹⁷ Abrash, "Digital Democracy, Digital History," 99.

Conclusion

As this chapter has explained, archives are not neutral repositories of materials that document the “way it really was.” Rather, archives are composed of individual archivists (Derrida’s *archons*) who actively shape what can be known about the past through their interpretation at every step in the process of archival construction. Therefore, there is not some intrinsic element in an object that makes it destined to arrive in an archive, but rather it becomes archival by the very “process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis.”¹⁹⁸ Consequently, by tracing the procedures and rationale used to create an archive; in other words creating an ethnography of an archive, one can analyze the powerful factors involved in shaping the content and organization of the archive.

The following chapters of this dissertation accomplish such an analysis by tracking the development of disaster archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. This analysis reveals the ways in which the unique characteristics of disaster archives disrupt some of the traditional understandings of archival production by immediately collecting material, both digital and physical, that would usually be clumped together as ephemera or not collected at all. However, because of the magnitude of these disasters, such material gains increased merit as it represents the loss of life and the shock of disaster. The new centrality of this ephemera material demonstrates the powerful role of affect in disaster archives, which works to figure some victims as representative of the U.S. nation and worthy of national

¹⁹⁸ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

mourning, while distancing or completely erasing others from the national imagination. This process of structuring national belonging in the space of archives relies on scenario-thinking based on principles of whiteness and heteronormativity. The following chapters unpack this process by investigating disaster collecting in both the physical and digital realms.

Chapter Three: Collecting Disaster: The National Museum of American History and September 11, 2001

“The tragic events of last September [2001] challenged the [National Museum of American History] NMAH and its staff to fulfill its responsibility to the American people in unprecedented ways to *collect history literally as it happens*.”¹⁹⁹

Introduction

On December 7, 2001, less than three months after the attacks on September 11th, House Resolution 3338 was passed by Congress, which contained an Amendment, entitled “September 11th Historical Act.”²⁰⁰ This amendment (Section 701), proposed by Senator Christopher Bond from Missouri, appropriates five million dollars to the Smithsonian and directs the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to “collect and preserve in the National Museum of American History artifacts relating to the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.”²⁰¹ The Act not only appropriates funds to the Smithsonian, but also directs consideration of which artifacts should be collected:

In carrying out subsection (a), the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution shall consider collecting and preserving – (1) pieces of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; (2) still and video images made by private individuals and the media; (3) personal narratives of survivors, rescuers, and

¹⁹⁹ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 1.. [emphasis mine]

²⁰⁰ Bond, *September 11th Historical Act*.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

government officials; and (4) other artifacts, recordings, and testimonials that the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution determines have lasting historical significance.²⁰²

Despite the significant impact of Congress directly intervening in museum practices, the September 11th Historical Act in many ways was already too late – the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History (NMAH) had already begun to collect materials relating to September 11th within one week of the attacks. The significance of these two events is far-reaching on two major levels. First, the September 11th Historical Act marks a significant intervention by Congress to actually direct the creation and contents of a museum collection at the Smithsonian, thus unmasking the intimate relationship between the production of cultural memories and national identity. Second, the fact the NMAH began to collect materials within days of September 11, 2001 marks a radical departure in archival theory, which previously had as its bedrock principle that significant time and distance were necessary before materials relating to an event could be properly collected. This departure in collection methods was deemed necessary because of the unique qualities of September 11th – namely that what was determined to be worthy of collection for preservation was exactly what was in need of being removed from the three sites – the rubble of the buildings and the debris from the planes. The need to act, or collect, quickly in the aftermath of disaster has now come to be referred to as “disaster collecting.”

²⁰² Ibid.

This dissertation chapter tracks the birth and implementation of this new type of collection as it reveals key mechanisms involved in giving meaning to the events of September 11, 2001 through the production of cultural memories. Among the most important of these mechanisms is the role that affect plays in structuring the collection, and simultaneously producing national subjects through the collection's content and configuration. Because disaster events are seen as moments of crisis in the nation that must be carefully preserved, unpacking this process of preservation enables one to interrogate the role that museums and archives play in instructing citizens what to remember, and in the case of September 11th how to mourn both an idealized citizen and an innocent past. This chapter proceeds with an explanation of (1) the origins and guiding principles of the Smithsonian Institution, (2) the importance of acquisition files to archival analysis, (3) the debate and eventual implementation of "disaster methods of collection," and (4) the significance and impact of the materials collected in shaping national identity, particularly the way in which notions of whiteness are employed to create identification with the victims of September 11th as emblematic of the national imaginary. Moreover, this analysis will be used as an important point of comparison in the following chapter concerning the second instance of disaster collecting employed by the NMAH – Hurricane Katrina.

Origins of the Smithsonian

The Smithsonian Institution was created by an act of Congress in 1847 funded by the inherited fortune of James Smithson, who directed the money be used to create

an “institution dedicated to the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.”²⁰³ Because the exact mission of the Smithsonian was unclear, Joseph Henry, who served as the first secretary of the Institution, envisioned that its purpose was for scientific research rather than an open public museum.²⁰⁴ However, Henry’s vision of the Institution changed dramatically in 1887 when G. Brown Goode became assistant secretary. In a now famous speech, Goode declared that museums were “‘handmaidens of science’, and history could be studied and displayed as scientifically as natural phenomena. The way museums presented information could demonstrate the laws of science and the laws of history.”²⁰⁵ Here the influence of the consolidation of the discipline of history, together with newly developed museum practices in Europe can be seen. As discussed in the previous chapter, museums and archives established detailed procedures in order to demonstrate that scientific methods were employed in order to ensure objectivity. In line with this thinking, Goode developed and instituted “a method for organizing materials in all the departments along uniform, evolutionary lines, so that all artifacts and specimens (natural, human, cultural, technological) were subjected to the same systematic, progressive arrangement.”²⁰⁶ He insisted on the importance of labels, explanatory material, accuracy, and the inclusion of the most recent research.²⁰⁷ Goode’s methods

²⁰³ Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker*, 31.

²⁰⁴ Levin, “Museums and the Democratic Order,” 57.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

were strictly adhered to until the 1960s when the Smithsonian Institution was split into “a congeries of specialized museums under the Smithsonian's umbrella.”²⁰⁸

One of these specialized museums was the National Museum of American History (NMAH) which opened to the public on 1964 and now averages four million visitors per year.²⁰⁹ The Smithsonian receives sixty-five percent²¹⁰ of its total budget from Congressional funding, though it is not technically a federal agency, but rather a public trust “held in the name of the people, with a purpose – the increase and diffusion of knowledge – that [supposedly] transcends the politics and politics of a particular government.”²¹¹ However, Richard Kurin, former director of the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, notes that the Smithsonian is, nonetheless, “keenly aware of its dependence on congressional goodwill.”²¹²

While the Smithsonian has received various degrees of acclaim or disapproval of its many exhibits, there is one planned exhibit that has significantly marked the Institution’s recent history, which, I argue, directly informed how and what was collected in the September 11th collection. In 1988 the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum began planning an exhibition to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. The centerpiece of this exhibit was to be the Enola Gay, the B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/about/mission.cfm>

²¹⁰ 2008 Smithsonian Budget Sources. [http://www.si.edu/about/documents/FY_2008_SI_Budget_Sources .pdf](http://www.si.edu/about/documents/FY_2008_SI_Budget_Sources.pdf)

²¹¹ Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker*, 80–1.

²¹² Ibid., 32.

exhibition, originally titled “The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II”, was designed to place the Enola Gay alongside artifacts from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus de-centering the United States and demonstrating the extent of the devastation inflicted by the weapons. Moreover, this contextualization “challenged traditional interpretations of [President] Truman’s decision to use nuclear weapons against Japanese civilians.”²¹³ When these plans were made public, they incited such controversy that the Smithsonian cancelled the exhibit, though it did ultimately have an exhibit that featured part of the Enola Gay, but largely devoid of any significant analysis.

The controversy was largely sparked by a campaign against the exhibition by the Air Force Association that was taken up by Newt Gingrich, which led to significant debate on the Congressional floor resulting in indictments of revisionist history and claims of “lack of honor” being thrust upon the Smithsonian. Veteran’s groups argued that the exhibition “was unpatriotic and inaccurate, an unfaithful way to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.”²¹⁴ When making the public announcement of the exhibition’s cancellation, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Michael Heyman, stated, “We made a basic error in attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the 50th anniversary commemoration of the end of the war...Veterans and their families were expecting...that the nation would honor and commemorate their valor and sacrifice...They were not looking for analysis, and...we did not give enough thought

²¹³ Boehm, “Privatizing Public Memory,” 1147.

²¹⁴ Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker*, 71.

to the intense feelings...analysis would evoke.”²¹⁵ The Enola Gay controversy rocked the Smithsonian and led to the replacement of the Secretary, Michael Heyman. It also made curators significantly more cautious in creating exhibitions relating to what could be considered “sensitive” events in history, especially when it thought that the public desired commemoration, rather than historical analysis – of course implying that commemoration is devoid of analysis. With this controversy still fresh in curators’ minds, the NMAH began to make plans to collect materials relating to the attacks on September 11, 2001 on September 12th.²¹⁶

The following section proceeds with an examination of the logics behind the production of the September 11th collection. In order to study the process of the production of the museum collection, this paper does not look at the objects contained in the collection as discrete entities unto themselves, but rather evaluates the process by which the archive was created, and the larger narratives produced by what is and is not inside the collection. Focusing on the process of acquisition allows one to gain a glimpse into the politics and relations of power that directly affect the process of collection, and consequently the structure and content of the archives. Moreover, it opens up the possibility to answer questions about why and how an object was collected, rather than merely analyzing the object itself.

²¹⁵ Thelen, “History After the Enola Gay Controversy,” 1029.

²¹⁶ A number of the curators that I interviewed mentioned a desire to avoid “another Enola Gay controversy” in the explanation of their how and what to collect for the September 11th collection.

Acquisition Files: Access and Organization

In order to address the dynamics of cultural memory and national identity involved in the production of NMAH's disaster collections, this project analyzes the museum's acquisition files. These acquisition files, which often get overlooked in archival research, document how each item in an archive is collected. Each item in a collection is given a unique number and its own file in order to document its "authenticity," which, as the previous chapter detailed, is necessary to produce the idea that museums and archives preserve items that allow access to "the way it really was." Inside this file is information concerning where and how the item was found, transfer of ownership from the donor to the museum, and any internal museum debate about the merits of collecting the item. This latter part which comes in the form of paper-copies of emails, trip reports, and shipping requests is of central importance to this project. These documents chronicle how and why an item was selected to be a part of the collection, and therefore demonstrate the process of the collection's construction. Thus, these acquisition files serve as the archive of the museum collection. Analysis of these acquisition files is supplemented with extensive interviews with key members of each collection team. Through these two methods of inquiry (archival research and ethnographic interviews), the project is able to address questions regarding the archive's structure and process of creation.

Before moving on to the following analysis of the acquisition files, it is important to make a note about terminology concerning archives and museum collections. As the previous theoretical chapter explained, archives and museums are

intimately connected, especially in terms of their histories and relationship to nation-states. Again, Milligan's work helps elucidate this connection.²¹⁷ Archives legitimated the function of nation-states by creating storehouses for information relating to its citizens and colonial subjects, and other important state documents, thus working to produce the idea of a common national history and memory. However, because of the varied documents that these archives contained, many state elites feared that they could be used to undermine the legitimacy of the state. In order to avoid this danger, while simultaneously producing the idea that archives were publically open, museum exhibitions were created to display a carefully orchestrated exhibit that would garner the idea of common national heritage. Over time, the commonplace understanding of museums was that they housed three-dimensional objects for the sole purpose of display and exhibition. On the other hand, archives exclusively contained paper documents.²¹⁸ However, many recent events in the field of historical preservation have disturbed this neat divide, including the prevalence of digital technologies and increasing collection efforts by museums.

The digitization of archival documents and digital photographs are increasingly being displayed online alongside one another and are rather interchangeably called either digital archives or digital exhibits even though both paper-based and three-dimensional objects are displayed.²¹⁹ Moreover, more and more museums are creating collections without the intention of ever displaying their

²¹⁷ Milligan, "Curious Archives."

²¹⁸ Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," 10.

²¹⁹ Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines."

contents in an exhibition. Quoting Keith Thomson,²²⁰ Richard Cox argues “that as museums and their collections grow, their function mutates ‘from action to archive’.

Thomson sees museums becoming archives because they begin to ‘acquire objects...*without ever intending to display them to the public*, but rather to have and hold an archive – implicitly or explicitly for scholarly research, or simply to preserve them for the future.’”²²¹ This is exactly the function at work in disaster archiving, especially the NMAH’s Hurricane Katrina collection. Therefore, as Marlene Manoff explains, the term archive now “refers to the contents of museums, libraries, and archives and thus the entire extant historical record.”²²² Because my investigation centers on an analysis of the material in the NMAH’s September 11th and Hurricane Katrina collections, especially their respective (paper-based) acquisition files, rather than museum exhibitions, I refer to these holdings interchangeably as collections and archives, because there is not a clear distinction between the two. Moreover, I employ a broad understanding of the term archive as representative of the “extant historical record” to emphasize the power of collected objects whether they be three-dimensional, paper-based, or digital to shape, in Derrida’s words, “the law,” and archivists who, as interpreters of those objects, “impose the law.”

I conducted research at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History from January through March, 2009 as a University of California, Washington D.C. graduate fellow. I was generously afforded unfettered access to the NMAH’s

²²⁰ Thomson, *Treasures on Earth*.

²²¹ Cox, *Flowers After the Funeral*, 18.

²²² Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines,” 10.

September 11th: Bearing Witness to History acquisition files, though gaining access to the Hurricane Katrina acquisition files was quite a bit more challenging – a point that while I mention here, will be discussed in significant detail in the next chapter. The different level of access afforded to these two collections has a profound effect on privileging one event, and the victims commemorated therein, and distancing the other, which has a major impact on notions of national belonging and identity. Furthermore, as noted above, as museums are increasingly creating collections that are never intended to be used as exhibitions, they serve the same function as archives – storehouses of past materials, though perhaps with an even greater degree of power. The objects in these collections are touted as always open to the public, but in reality their access is significantly restricted. In fact, in many ways, access to these museum collections are even more restrictive than material in established archives, because they lack any type of procedures for researchers to gain access to them. Therefore, it is often up to the individual curator of the collection whether and how to allow access to researchers.

This power dynamic was directly evidenced by my efforts to gain access to the September 11th and Hurricane Katrina collections. My request to see the two collections was met with some confusion among different NMAH staff, as they did not know who had the power to grant me access. I was told that to see the actual objects in the collection would require extensive clearance procedures as the objects were stored offsite in the Smithsonian's vast warehouse holdings in Maryland, over 50 miles away. The safety of the condition of these disaster objects was still in

question as they were covered in possible toxic dust and were in a preserved, destroyed state making my ability to actually touch them impossible. If I, in fact, still wanted to see them, I was told, I would need to be constantly accompanied by a museum staff member, which again, would be nearly impossible given their extremely overtaxed work load. Consequently, the actual “openness” of this collection is questionable at best. If, in fact, objects do “speak for themselves” as the museum literature suggests, the inability for researchers to see objects in a collection presents an enormous obstacle to analyzing the past.

Luckily, I was more interested in viewing the acquisition files of the two collections, rather than the actual objects themselves, which presented far fewer issues relating to clearance. I was allowed to view the September 11th acquisition files in the NMAH’s archival reading room. The NMAH also has its own archive of mostly paper-based collections, together with a photography archive. The actual lines of demarcation between the archive, photography archive, and museum collection are difficult to understand, again underscoring the murky distinction between archive and museum collection. I had to go through the same procedures as all researchers entering the reading room. I was instructed to leave all my personal items in a locker outside the room. I was only allowed to bring my laptop computer into the room. If I needed a pencil or paper to take notes, I would have to request those from the archivist in the reading room. I was only allowed to have one acquisition file open and on the table at a time, and the archivists, together with multiple surveillance cameras, watched my every move as I analyzed the files. Just as the previous chapter

explained, these detailed procedures produce the idea that the materials that I was viewing were precious and in need of protection, as they uniquely represented artifacts essential to the continued preservation of national memory. However, the same care and protection afforded to the September 11th acquisition files was remarkably absent from the Hurricane Katrina files. As I will detail in the following chapter, I was given only one day to research the Katrina files, and I was put at a largely unmonitored desk in an office within the curators' private office building. I could have all my personal belongings with me, and all of the files open at one time, if I desired, as no one was watching my every move. This extreme discrepancy in viewing protocol clearly demonstrates which artifacts are thought to be in need of protection, because they are central to American cultural memory, and which, quite obviously, are not.

The September 11th collection's acquisition files were extremely organized with a central binder that provided a detailed description of each item in the collection, a picture of the item, its acquisition reference number, and donor information if made public at the bequest of the donor. Each page in the binder corresponded to a separate file folder that contained additional information relating to the object, especially personal information concerning the person who once owned the object. The reference page of each object in the acquisition file's central binder, which gives a short narrative of the significance of the object to the museum collection, was reproduced and posted on the NMAH's webpage,²²³ the significance

²²³ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/>

of which will be discussed below. Additionally, the museum created an exhibition dedicated to the display objects in the collection. However, as the following chapter will explore in detail, this was in stark contrast to a disorganized and underdeveloped Hurricane Katrina collection that also lacked any online or exhibition aspect. In Chapter Four, I argue that this difference in the basic attention given to the two archives reveals significant information regarding the value of each collection, thereby clearly indicating which event is deemed more worthy of remembrance.

Collecting “History-in-the-Making”

The unique qualities embedded within disaster archives began with the idea that the events of September 11, 2001 marked an event of both historical and national proportion that rarely occurs. There was a strong belief held by many within and outside of the NMAH that September 11th represented a moment of history-in-the-making, and thereby necessitated immediate collection and preservation. As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, this sentiment was also shared by Congress as evidenced by the “September 11th Historical Act”. In a letter to the Smithsonian explaining the recent passage of HR 3338, Senator Bond makes an interesting suggestion that reflects a common sentiment among many curators:

The museum should establish an email address to collect the contemporaneous accounts of witnesses to the September 11th attacks that were emailed on that day...These emails, possibly still resting in email “in-boxes,” constitute a treasure-trove of contemporaneous, first-person accounts of history. *Every day that goes by without an effort to collect these emails increases the risk*

that they are lost to time...We must act now before key artifacts, memories and emotions are lost to time. The September 11th attacks were acts of enormous historical significance, the full consequences of which have yet to be understood fully. The scale and magnitude of the September 11th, 2001, attacks were so large as to influence the American identity in ways that only future historians will be able to describe. The immediate collection of first-hand accounts and artifacts from the attacks will help Smithsonian experts fulfill their roles as interpreters of the past [emphasis mine].²²⁴

The NMAH also heeded this suggestion of capturing Internet responses to September 11th by partnering with George Mason University's Center for History and New Media to help create the 9/11 Digital Archive. Additionally, the NMAH set up a specific page on their website (www.americanhistory.si.edu/september11) to collect people's impressions and feelings regarding the events of September 11th. While this topic of Internet archives receives significant attention in chapters five and six, it is important to note the pressing feeling expressed in the letter that there were important artifacts that needed to be collected, but were at risk of being "lost to time." As stated in the epigraph, this element of immediacy in the realm of collecting is also reflected by NMAH director Marc Pachter's explanation that "the tragic events of last September [2001] challenged the NMAH and its staff to fulfill its responsibility to the American people in unprecedented ways to *collect history literally as it happens*" [emphasis mine].²²⁵ This conception of collecting "history literally as it happens" challenges many assumptions held by curators and archivists that were explained in the previous chapter. Moreover, the creation and implementation of disaster

²²⁴ Correspondence. From Senator Christopher Bond to Lawrence Small, Secretary of the Smithsonian. December 11, 2001.

²²⁵ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 1.

collection methods reveal the ways in which emotions are activated in the space of archives to produce national subjects.

One key NMAH division chair explains that the curatorial staff at the NMAH was already making plans for collection on September 12th – the day after the attacks.²²⁶ In fact, they used their weekly staff meeting as a space to discuss the collecting efforts. According to the division chair, there was significant disagreement about whether it was appropriate to collect any materials at all. Some of the staff felt that it was much too soon to collect, because they needed extensive time to evaluate which objects were worthy of collection and therefore historical in nature. This point of view represents the traditional understanding of the methods needed to maintain objectivity, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Others felt that the event was so tragic that it would be wholly inappropriate to collect materials at all. According to the Smithsonian’s study “The September 11 Collecting Effort,”²²⁷ there was also another grouping of staff members who believed that the “NMAH shouldn’t support an aggressive response to collecting unless it included considerable contextual materials, e.g., Muslim life.”²²⁸ However, some also felt (including the Director of the NMAH) that they should not miss the opportunity to collect materials relating to what many were calling, even at that time, a history-changing event.

²²⁶ In order to protect the anonymity of this interview, I will refer to this person as “the Division Chair” and use the pronoun ‘he’. Moreover, I do not use the names of any of the people I interviewed, instead referring to their official institutional position. I do, however, use names of individuals if I refer to publications in their names.

²²⁷ The study was conducted in May 2003 and contains information from 40 staff members who gave confidential interviews to the staff responsible for the study.

²²⁸ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 5.

The fact that the NMAH, and many other museums along with them,²²⁹ decided to seize the opportunity to collect *history-in-the-making* marks a departure from traditional understandings of the way in which historical objects are collected for museums. This departure in method underscores the tenuous nature of the assumptions embedded within the field of historic preservation that museums and archives are neutral storehouses for authentic materials of the past, and simultaneously opens up the possibility of analyzing the role affect plays in structuring collections wherein “evidence [is] an emotional category.”²³⁰ Paul Williams in *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* define the idea the common understanding of a museum as “an institution devoted to the acquisition, conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation of objects with scientific, historical, or artistic value.”²³¹ Embedded within such an understanding of the museum, is that curators and archivists are somehow able, as Hayden White explains, to eschew “ideology and remain true to the facts”, thereby producing a history that is “as certain as anything offered by the physical sciences and as objective as a mathematical exercise.”²³² Accordingly, objects held within history museums are viewed as a source of historical evidence and have a distinct quality of objectivity and authenticity.²³³ It is assumed that museum curators and archivists²³⁴

²²⁹ Most notably the New York State Museum, the New York Historical Society, the New York City Museum, and Firefighter’s Association.

²³⁰ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 137.

²³¹ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 8.

²³² White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” 25.

²³³ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 25.

are better able to attain this position of objectivity and eschew their own political ideologies by dealing with periods that have passed, to which they do not belong. Therefore, current events are not thought of as the material of history, but rather the arena of journalists.

As the previous chapter explains, these assumptions have been thoroughly critiqued by demonstrating the immense power that archivists, curators, and historians have in interpreting what material is collected, displayed, and explained, thereby instructing societies what and how to remember. Nonetheless, these assumptions still directly inform and direct how museums and archives are administered and maintained, including the NMAH. For example, the Smithsonian's self-study of the September 11th collecting efforts notes a common sentiment among staff, "collectors were mindful of the fact that 'Disaster collecting is different. We don't usually do that. We collect more as evidence, the way the FBI does.'"²³⁵ This quote from a museum staff member demonstrates the role that most museum curators see for themselves – that they are investigators searching for the truth of the past, which can be accomplished through a systematic and scientific process. Richard Kurin, former director of the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, describes the relationship between curators and objects as follows: "Human interpreters need to be close by to sense the object, examine it, and compare it to others, in order to make judgments about its provenance, meaning worth, and

²³⁴ Again, I am grouping archivists and curators together in this analysis as are both responsible for the selection, organization, and retrieval of collected material, thereby holding immense power to shape the past at every step.

²³⁵ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 8.

placement.”²³⁶ Therefore, given this idea that objects are collected systematically, scientifically, and objectively, it is easy to see how the issue of immediately collecting objects relating to disaster events becomes extremely problematic for museum curators who believe that objectivity can only be obtained with hindsight.

The ways in which museum curators dealt with the problematic aspect of collecting disaster for their field is demonstrated through substantial debate over the structure of the September 11th collection. Once the decision was made to collect objects relating to September 11th, another debate ensued concerning how to collect and then how to categorize and house the material once it was actually collected. Ultimately, and after a few failed attempts at other methods, the decision was made to send one museum representative to each site (New York City, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania) to be responsible for collecting material, and then the material would be housed in a collection under the Military History Division. However, other divisions²³⁷ could collect material that they deemed relevant to their particular theme; for example, the photography division has a significant collection of its own.

According to the Division Chair, the NMAH met considerably less resistance from the federal government compared to past experiences in their September 11th collection efforts thanks in large part to HR 3338. At first he feared that HR 3338 would negatively impact the type of collection the NMAH wanted to create.

²³⁶ Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker*, 57.

²³⁷ The main divisions in the NMAH are Politics & Reform, Medicine & Science, Work & Industry, Military History, Music, Sports & Entertainment, Home & Community Life, Information Technology & Communications, and the Archives Center.

Ultimately, however, he believed the Congressional Act proved helpful because the NMAH was able to receive objects that were held by other government entities. There were issues involved in the transfer of ownership of objects from federal institutions (such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation) to non-federal entities, but because of the Smithsonian's status as a trust instrumentality of the US and the September 11th Historical Act, giving objects to the Smithsonian was seen as an internal transfer between different governmental divisions. This increased power afforded to the Smithsonian, together with the mandate by Congress, positioned the NMAH to be represented as the official repository for September 11th artifacts, though many museums in New York would likely contest such a title, and many Smithsonian staff were uncomfortable with such a designation.²³⁸

The NMAH staff also decided early on that they were “incapable of collecting everything relating to 9/11;”²³⁹ therefore, they would collect a small representative group of objects.²⁴⁰ They then established a chronology of events – what issues led to attack, the attack, the recovery, the clean-up effort, and the lasting impact of the events of September 11th, 2001. However, the Division Chair, who was also the lead curator for the Pentagon site, explains that they did not in reality “follow collecting in this way, for instance they have nothing about the lead-up to the event.”²⁴¹ Rather the majority of their collection focuses on “the attack, rescue attempt, and clean-up, but

²³⁸ See also Summary at end of April 25 trip report

²³⁹ Personal Interview with ‘Deputy Chair’, January 9, 2009.

²⁴⁰ Personal Interview with “Division Chair”, January 14, 2009.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

not with subsequent effects.”²⁴² The effect of such a structure is extremely important in generating a particular narrative of September 11th that ignores historical and political events before and after this short timeline; the significance of this framing is discussed in greater detail below.

The Division Chair also expresses a key challenge in what he calls “collecting contemporary history”; he explains that there is a “line between current event and history, but that line is quite difficult to judge. Many things seem very important at the time, but with time they often don’t prove to be important.”²⁴³ Interestingly, he believes that the September 11th collection “is not a research collection, but rather contains icons that would capture the attitude of the country at the time.”²⁴⁴ The Division Chair’s comments suggest an extremely important difference between the September 11th collection and the framing of the vast majority of the other collections held by the NMAH. This difference is also evidenced by the Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs, who explains that the collection “‘is not about explaining September 11, but it is about sharing stories.’ The museum will not offer explanations of the origins of terrorism, like it might for labor history or the development of electronics. ‘There is a lot to be said on the subject of terrorism but it is not an appropriate role for us’”²⁴⁵ Whereas most collections are assumed to be research collections which focus on the accrual of knowledge about the past, the

²⁴² Ibid. This fact is also supported by the Smithsonian’s study on the 9/11 collecting effort, which states that the collecting team “decided to limit collecting to the event itself, the rescue, and the recovery.” P.7

²⁴³ Division Chair, January 14, 2009.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Trescott, “A Day in Pieces, America In Grief; Smithsonian Curators Scramble to Save Artifacts of Sept. 11.”

September 11th collection was structured to serve as a national memorial, in which the objects held in the collection are sacred as they represent lives lost.

This important difference is central to understanding the impact of the collection of producing ideas of national belonging and citizen-subject production. However, this distinction was not acknowledged and was in fact, denied by most of the museum staff, because it would have undermined the museum's claims to objectivity and authenticity. For instance, the primary curator in New York City and later the sole curator for the Hurricane Katrina collection, explains in a letter to the Director of the September 11th Collection that he saw his main objective as:

Look[ing] at the universe of material from 911 and seek[ing] a small constellation of choice artifacts. Unlike most of the other efforts currently underway, my immediate *goal is not a memorial or exhibition, but the creation of a permanent collection that will have lasting usefulness in several areas, including research.* High-priority artifacts are those linked with the experiences of specific, identified individuals (squeegee, briefcase, file cabinet, K-9, ironworker, telephone.) Other artifacts (steel, airplane) have direct links to the towers themselves [emphasis mine].²⁴⁶

Moreover, the publicized description of the collection explains that the September 11th collection is a research collection just the same as all other NMAH collections; although the objects were collected differently than in the past, because of the extenuating circumstances of the disastrous event. The Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs calls it a “‘foundational collection,’ one that would be a ‘lasting material record.’”²⁴⁷ Additionally, the Deputy Chair/Associate Curator, was quite adamant that that the collection now represents an “accurate picture of what

²⁴⁶ Lead Curator for New York, email message to Director of September 11th Collection, Jan 28 2002. p. 6

²⁴⁷ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 7.

happened:”²⁴⁸ with this the efforts for claiming authenticity are quite clear. However, when one actually analyzes what is contained within the collection it becomes obvious that the emphasis is not on the political and historical contexts, but rather the experiences and emotions of loss and destruction. For example, there are no objects relating to historical or political events that led to the terrorist attacks or resulted from the attacks, such as the beginning of the war in Afghanistan or Iraq, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, or the passage of the USA PATRIOT ACT. Nor is there any information relating to the so-called terrorists themselves or the supposed organization they represent, Al-Qaeda. Instead, the objects represent either lives lost, brushes with death, heroic acts, or practices of memorialization, thereby giving the objects highly emotional components that often create an air of sacredness.

One of the primary reasons that the NMAH wanted to emphasize that the collection was representative and primarily for research was a fear among a number of museum staff that the Bond Amendment, along with the collection itself could result in the Smithsonian’s NMAH becoming primarily associated with September 11th, thereby overshadowing their many other collections relating to U.S. history. This concern is illustrated by the Division Chair in the same email to the official at the New York State Museum. He states,

The Smithsonian of course is looking at a national 911 story that includes New York as one important element...Unlike the rhetoric expressed in the Bond amendment the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History does not intend to amass a huge 911 collection of record. We perceive this

²⁴⁸ Personal Interview with ‘Deputy Chair’, January 9, 2009.

event as an important point in history but not one that should disrupt the balance of existing collections.²⁴⁹

The Division Chair feared that the NMAH would become ‘the 9/11 museum’, meaning that the public would see the Smithsonian’s NMAH as first and foremost concerned with collecting, researching, and exhibiting objects relating to September 11th above all other historical events in U.S. history. He expresses this concern directly in a discussion about how to exhibit a piece of the World Trade Center steel.

As many other scholars have noted, the World Trade Center steel that remained after the collapse of the Towers in many ways came to represent the bodies of victims that were not found. Marita Sturken in *Tourists of History* explains that the steel came to assume “an emblem of fragility and vulnerability that not only evokes the force with which the buildings fell but also stands in for the human bodies that did not withstand the fall. Thus, the objects are imbued with the tragic meaning of bodies lost.”²⁵⁰ This was demonstrated most clearly by the way in which the last piece of steel was removed from the former site of the World Trade Center, also more popularly known as Ground Zero. This 58-ton piece of steel from the south tower became an impromptu memorial and was cut down on May 28, 2002; thus marking the end of the recovery effort. With great ceremony, the piece of steel was “laid on a flatbed truck, wrapped in black muslin and an American flag, and tucked in a corner of the pit” followed solemnly by bagpipes and drum players.²⁵¹ After the column was properly stored, “the men and women marched up the ramp through a Navy honor

²⁴⁹ Email Correspondence, Division Chair.

²⁵⁰ Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 208.

²⁵¹ LeDuff, Charlie., “Last Steel Column From the Ground Zero Rubble Is Cut Down - New York Times.”

guard, and each worker was handed an American flag. The workers walked past the banner that read ‘We Will Never Forget’ and headed for the taverns.’²⁵²

While the Division Chair certainly saw the World Trade Center steel as constituting an important object worthy of collection, he worried about the consequence of the NMAH collecting this last piece of remaining steel, an object which many in the museum desperately wanted to possess. He explained that the beam was too tall to fit in any room of the museum other than the central lobby. However, it was then determined that the structural design of the museum floor could not withstand the sheer weight of the beam, (which holds interesting symbolism for the entirety of this debate). Therefore, some thought that the beam should be placed outside the museum on the main walkway to the museum’s entrance. However, the Division Chair argued that if it was placed there, it would never be able to be taken down as it would likely become a memorial. As a result, many people were likely to argue that to take it down would be tantamount to dishonoring those who died in the Towers’ collapse – a comment which clearly harkens back to the Enola Gay controversy. Consequently, the Division Chair surmised, this large steel beam would become a permanent piece, making it the main focal point as people “entered American history.”²⁵³ Because of the worry that the collection of this beam would overshadow the rest of the museum’s exhibitions, the Division Chair’s opinion won out, and the museum decided to collect significantly smaller pieces of the steel that could more easily be housed and displayed in the museum. Though the museum

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Division Chair, January 14, 2009.

decided not to house the last remaining WTC steel beam, it reveals the stakes involved in a museum of history being viewed as a memorial. I argue that the status of memorial would have undercut the museum's task of promoting objective knowledge about the past because it would have exposed the always subjective nature of creating accounts of the past – no matter the time and distance.

Focusing on Loss, Destruction, and Heroism

Though the museum does not wish to portray the September 11th collection as a memorial, but rather a research collection, it nonetheless functions as one under the guise of 'objective' research. The collection is composed of a number of iconic objects, which focus on the experiences of loss, destruction, and heroism, rather than historical and political elements. Two important questions result from this conclusion. First, how does one determine what is an iconic object? Second, what is the effect of focusing on experiences of loss, destruction, and heroism for an event that is thought to mark a watershed moment in U.S. history?

In *Iconic Events: Media, Politics, and Power in Retelling History*, Patricia Leavy makes an interesting argument regarding how iconic events are constituted.²⁵⁴ She argues that the American press plays a central role in determining which events receive iconic status, and consequently become “staples in collective memory, also influencing *how* these events are interpreted.”²⁵⁵ Furthermore, “the press constructs

²⁵⁴ Leavy, *Iconic Events*.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

very particular and limited narratives about these selected events, providing interpretations that are often built on simplified mythical concepts (such as patriotism, martyrdom, heroism and evil).”²⁵⁶ While it may seem obvious that the mainstream media has a large effect on which events receive iconic status because they hold the power of determining which stories are told and which are ignored, the slippage between what the media deems important and how museums collect and create exhibits may not be so clear.

As previously noted, museums are often thought of as objective institutions that store and display historically significant artifacts. The impact that the media has on museum collecting efforts is heightened in this new field of “disaster collecting” as curators are not only affected by the media themselves, but are also trying to walk the fine line between collecting what they see as historically significant and simultaneously fulfilling some cathartic role through commemoration, all the while working to remain in the good graces of major funders, most notably Congress. It certainly seems difficult to assess what are and may be important artifacts, objects which are responsible for serving as representations of historical significance. However, there does not seem to be a direct recognition that the media plays a significant role in determining which items are collected and which are not. The influence of the media in determining iconic objects together with the effect of focusing on personal stories is evidenced by four major areas of collection in the

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

NMAH's September 11th collection: worker's tools, personal effects of victims, uniforms and tools of firefighters and police officers, and memorial materials.

One of the objects that the NMAH is most proud to have in its collection is Jan Demczur's, a former World Trade Center window washer, window cleaning squeegee handle (see image 1). Both the acquisition files and the online exhibition of



Image 1: Window Washer Squeegee Handle²⁵⁷

the collection present a heroic narrative that is thought to be embodied in the squeegee handle. The following narrative is in the acquisition files, reproduced on the website, and was also used in the museum's exhibition on September 11th:²⁵⁸

When a hijacked airplane struck the north tower of the World Trade Center, six men, including Polish immigrant window washer Jan Demczur, found themselves trapped in an express elevator at the 50th floor. Thinking quickly, Demczur and the others pried open the elevator doors and used this squeegee handle to cut their way through the drywall of the elevator shaft. They

²⁵⁷ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=35>. Accessed 2/13/12.

²⁵⁸ Many short narratives, such as this one relating to Mr. Demczur's window washing handle, are created in order to be placed alongside the object in a museum exhibition, internet collection, and/or press release. This is usually the only information regarding the object that a viewer will receive.

squeezed through the hole in the wall, fleeing from the building just minutes before the tower fell.²⁵⁹

Many important and symbolic moves occur as this simple squeegee handle is transformed into an iconic piece of history. Paul Williams explains, “Museums often seek to grant [an object] a dynamic life history, assigning it a dramatic role in the historical story of any event. That is, the idea that an object ‘witnessed’ an atrocity is a rhetorical strategy that aims to humanize something that existed during the period; the object itself gains a ‘life.’”²⁶⁰ One way in which this object demonstrates that it somehow ‘witnessed’ this heroic escape is the fact that there is still plaster and white dust from the drywall stuck to the handle. There is a note in the acquisition files that makes clear that this debris is in no way supposed to be removed as it contributes to the authenticity of the object.

This note brings to light an important point in this new field of disaster collection. Because these objects are supposed to represent a disaster and destruction, they are purposefully preserved in a destroyed state. In fact, during his interview, the Division Chair mentioned that it was quite difficult and costly to maintain these objects in their ‘destroyed’ states, because they required special preservation measures that are not usually implemented. In the past, curators always worked to return objects to their former pristine condition, but in this case all of the September 11th objects had to be kept in their destroyed states, because the dust and destruction was itself an artifact that had to be preserved. The efforts made to preserve objects in

²⁵⁹ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=35>

²⁶⁰ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 31.

their destroyed states demonstrates the emphasis that the museum wished to place on the extent of the devastation and tragedy of the event, and simultaneously reveals the ways in which this collection functions as a memorial. The debris on the objects are seen as representing lives lost; thus to remove them would be tantamount to destroying their memory. Therefore, the objects become sacred and demand reverence, not critical thought.

Another important symbolic move that occurs with the squeegee handle is the way in which it works to stand in for the heroic tale of Mr. Demczur, and becomes a sign of life and rescue. Without the squeegee handle, Mr. Demczur and the five other men in the elevator might not have escaped, and instead faced the same imminent death as all the other people in the towers. As one looks at the picture of the squeegee handle and reads the story of Mr. Demczur, it is easy to feel a number of things, such as awe that Mr. Demczur was able to accomplish such a difficult task with a simple tool, or sadness that Mr. Demczur was one of just a few people able to escape or fear that you might not be able to accomplish the same task if confronted with the same situation, which is a possibility since, as the collection itself suggests, the world has now changed forever. While a number of feelings are possible, the important point here is just that – feeling. In fact, the vast majority of the objects in the collection appeal not to reason, but to emotion.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ I do not in any way want to imply that there is some strict bifurcation between reason and emotion or a split between the mind and body. Many critical feminists have clearly demonstrated the construction of such a binary, and its gendering effect. Nonetheless, the binary is often called upon in public discourse to value reason over emotion, which is why the NMAH does not want its September 11th collection to be defined as a memorial that appeals to emotions.

Again, Ann Cvetkovich's work is crucially important to analyzing the centrality of emotion in archival collections. As the previous chapter explained, Cvetkovich articulates the potential affective power of archives, which preserve and produce "not just knowledge but feeling."²⁶² She explains that the producers of gay and lesbian archives "propose that affects—associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma—make a document significant."²⁶³ While Cvetkovich is referring to gay and lesbian archives that consider such objects and their emotional capacity significant, and the ways in which traditional archives silence these important gay and lesbian histories and their emotional evidence, her analysis of the affective power of archives is directly relevant for the September 11th collection. As the proceeding analysis of the content in the September 11th collection makes clear, the unique characteristics of disaster archives including immediate collection of objects in destroyed states bring a specific emotional component into the archive, which has profound implications for producing national subjects. The September 11th collection's archive of feeling has the effect of interpellating viewers into a project of identification that ultimately produces a citizen-subject that remembers September 11th as an event marked by pain, heroism, and strength, while forgetting larger political and historical factors that contributed to and resulted from the attacks on that day.

The highly emotional and sacred elements of these objects are also evidenced by the care and detail given to their collection and a newly public role of curators'

²⁶² Cvetkovich, "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings," 109–10.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 112.

feelings. For the first time in its history, the NMAH created an online exhibition with a virtual wing devoted to describing the thought and feelings of museum curators. This virtual wing is titled “curator stories,” and houses audio and text files from the curators discussing how they felt as they collected the September 11th objects. This new aspect of disaster archives further enforces the emotional aspect of the objects collected, as viewers are made privy to curator’s feelings during the collection process.

One of these curator stories relates to Mr. Demszur’s squeegee handle and documents the way in which the lead New York curator first heard about Mr. Demszur’s story through a news report, and set off to find him to discover if he happened to keep the squeegee handle after his escape. In a rather dramatic fashion, the curator explains,

When I was tasked with the job of building a collection, however, I went to one window cleaner in particular who I had read about: Jan Demczur, of Jersey City, a man who did a really big thing on September 11. He used his window-cleaning squeegee to cut his way out of an elevator on the 50th floor of the World Trade Center after it had jammed and stopped. He was with five other men. They crawled through the hole he had made with this squeegee handle and escaped from the building just minutes before it came down. I called Jan in December--after some difficulties, I found him in Jersey City--met with him and asked him the big question: Did you hang onto the handle, do you still have that squeegee handle? He left the room and came back with something wrapped in a red handkerchief. Turned out to be the handle. He had kept the handle without realizing it.²⁶⁴

This dramatic story of discovery not only reinforces the idea that this singular squeegee handle has some intrinsic element that marks it as historically important, but it also helps to cover up the implicit role of the media in determining iconic objects.

²⁶⁴ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/transcript.asp?ID=53>

It was the media that sensationalized Mr. Demczur's heroic tale of escape. In fact, the publicity was so great that Mr. Demczur was asked to speak at a national trade union conference, was flown to Oakland, California to visit the headquarters of Ettore (the company that made the squeegee), and was given a personal letter by President and Mrs. Bush thanking him for his heroic acts. The curator's narrative builds to a climax when he discovers Mr. Demczur does in fact still possess the squeegee handle and is willing to donate it to the museum. This tale of investigation and discovery overshadows any question of how this one particular object came to receive iconic status. No doubt there were many other stories of near escape that were never reported by the media, and therefore not preserved in the museum.

Moreover, the squeegee handle also effectively stands in for the many working class people who labored in the Towers alongside the business executives. However, it is important to note that the image of the working class is represented through Mr. Demczur, who, as the attached narrative is quick to point out, is a Polish immigrant. Thus, one simultaneously receives the image of white, European immigrant man alongside the symbol of the squeegee handle as a typical tool of the working class. What is not mentioned in the online exhibition, but stated only in email correspondence within the acquisition files is that Mr. Demczur was an undocumented worker, who did not speak much English, and therefore did not have a copy of his passport to donate to the museum as the curator had originally hoped. Placing this white, European, working-class man who used his own working tool as a means of escape in New York (the historical port of entry for European immigration),

and ignoring issues of language and documentation, works to subtly support the prevailing narratives of the American melting pot. Furthermore, it also supports the common trope of masculine heroes deployed after September 11th, which will be explored in more detail below.

These tropes of the American melting pot and masculine heroes are again evidence of Diana Taylor's conception of 'scenario thinking.' As Taylor explains, "scenarios are 'durable, transposable dispositions.' That is, they are passed on and remain remarkably coherent paradigms of seemingly unchanging attitudes and values. Yet, they adapt constantly to reigning conditions...scenarios refer to more specific repertoires of cultural imagining."²⁶⁵ Moreover, scenarios work through "reactivation rather than duplication. Scenarios conjure up past situations, at times so profoundly internalized by a society that no one remembers the precedence...Rather than a copy, the scenario constitutes a once-againness."²⁶⁶ Thus, Mr. Demczur's squeegee handle works neatly within the scenario of America as a melting pot that allows for opportunities for those who work hard, in which the main characters are white males, thereby disappearing those who do not match such a character profile. Therefore, this squeegee handle becomes one of the centerpieces of the collection, rather than an object that would commemorate the unknown number of undocumented workers from the Global South who were killed in the building's collapse. Such objects would highlight the vast amount of labor that undocumented workers pour into the U.S. economy, the uneven power relations between the U.S. and the Global South

²⁶⁵ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 31.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

resulting from colonial and neo-colonial practices, the push and pull of the globalized market forces, the uneven practices of granting visas to Europeans and ‘high-skilled’ workers, and the racialized and gendered inequalities that mark U.S. society. However, these objects do not fit within the scenario of the U.S. as the land of freedom, so they remain invisible.

This subtle process of racialization through artifact collection is also demonstrated through a telling exchange of email correspondence in the acquisition file that indicated a need to address undocumented workers. In an email from the Director of the September 11th Collection to the lead New York curator on March 26, 2002, the Director states,

Your last point about the immigrant workforce – the issue of collecting related to immigrants and *even undocumented aliens* has been raised repeatedly over the last week or so, most recently at the Latino Advisory Board meeting. Please check with [a museum staff member] about what connections she and members of the board might have – enlist her help in this. We also need to be sensitive about including the stories of custodial and service staff in the show (in addition to the window washer) – in several contexts I have heard concerns expressed that most of the attention in the media, etc. has been focused on management/white collar and on Anglos [emphasis mine].²⁶⁷

Two significant issues arise in this email; first, there is a collapse of undocumented aliens and Latinos; second, the email indicates a need to be representative, not because it is important in its own right, but to head off any potential criticism. The racialized thinking undergirding this directive to collect more objects relating to immigrant communities led to a similarly racialized outcome, which works to center white, working class men in the national imaginary.

²⁶⁷ September 11 Director, March 26, 2002.

The objects that were ultimately collected to heed this call were a number of dinnerware objects and uniforms from the Windows on the World restaurant, which was located on the top floor of North World Trade Tower. The restaurant was commonly known for hiring international staff, many of whom were undocumented. Therefore, the museum curators were hoping to be more representative by including these international workers. In fact, there are actually a large number of these objects – plates, silverware, menus, napkins, glasses, pamphlets – so many that they seem odd. This peculiar feeling that one gets from viewing this over-representative number of objects relating to the restaurant actually have more to do with the condition of these objects – they are brand new – pristine. In fact, they came from a warehouse located many miles from the former World Trade Center. These objects stand out then, because, they are not destroyed; they do not have any sacred dust on them. Therefore, they do not generate a feeling of reverence, empathy, compassion, and sadness as did the other objects that were burned, broken, and covered in dust. In fact they seem so out of place as to be irrelevant. Thus, the presence of these pristine objects actually produces a subtle shifting of focus away from the racialized immigrant workers they are supposed to represent and towards the other destroyed objects, which center norms of whiteness, such as the squeegee handle.

The NMAH could have collected items relating to the vast amounts of labor from undocumented workers that were essential to the daily functioning of the Twin Towers – the invisibilized labor – the cleaning, cooking, repairing, building, and other forms of upkeep that the U.S. simultaneously demands and criminalizes. Many of the

workers whose labor sustained the very existence of the World Trade Center were effectively disappeared in the Towers' collapse. They lacked the "official" documentation that the state required to recognize their existence as victims. As Brother Magallán, director of Asociación Tepeyac de New York explains the only way to "prove" who was killed in the collapse of the World Trade Center "is for the employers to cooperate. They are the ones who have lists of who was working for them, documented or undocumented. But the employers are afraid that they will be penalized."²⁶⁸ Brother Magallán and the entirety of the Asociación Tepeyac non-profit organization mobilized in the days after September 11th to demand accountability for the undocumented workers killed in the attacks and their families. The work of Tepeyac is extremely important in demonstrating the centrality of certain forms of documents in proving one's very existence, and the powerful structures at work that disappear these people, their labor, and the unequal system upon which it all rests. By a complete omission of any of these vital issues, the NMAH's September 11th collection perpetuates this absence, this time disappearing the workers from the historical record. In the place of this absence are the pristine, clean plates from the Windows on the World restaurant warehouse, wiped clean of any of the markers of these very real imbalances of power.

A second significant area of collection is personal items from victims who lost their lives in the collapse of the towers and plane crashes, such as various identification cards, credit cards, wallets, briefcases, personal business letters,

²⁶⁸ Louie, "THE 9/11 DISAPPEARED.".

luggage tags, and cell phones (for example see image 2). Paul Williams writes about



the effect of these personal items, “on the one hand, they [identification cards]

Image 2: Wallet Recovered from World Trade Center²⁶⁹

represent the property and mechanisms of state bureaucracy...On the other hand, then, intrinsic relation to personhood makes identity cards indispensable objects” for museums.²⁷⁰ Therefore, these everyday objects that are normally used without much thought, become emblems “frozen in time”²⁷¹ of the lives that used to be, but are now gone forever; they are transformed from the level of the mundane to a level that is emotionally charged.

Each of these objects had its own file that contained extensive information on the life of the person who once owned the particular personal object. Each file featured an individual photograph of the person who once owned the object. Moreover, the files contained birthday cards, wedding announcements, family

²⁶⁹http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/search_record.asp?search=1&keywords=wallet&mode=&record=2. Accessed 2/13/12.

²⁷⁰ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 32.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

photographs, personal letters, and even a few school report cards. Much of this information is also displayed in the digital exhibition of the collection on NMAH's website. The display of supplemental information from object acquisition files is rare as objects are usually chosen for their power "to speak for themselves." Furthermore, as the previous chapter explained, many of these pieces of information would normally be classified as ephemera material and either not collected at all or clumped together with other ephemera material, thereby placing them outside of the extensive cataloguing system. However, in the case of this disaster collection, it was precisely the ephemera nature of this supporting material that produced its affective power. In much the same way as the photographs of the missing that lined the streets of New York City after September 11th became powerful markers of the lives that once were - of a fleeting possibility of hope "hung in suspension between a call for information and a death notice,"²⁷² so too did these supporting materials. Therefore, the fact that this ephemera material accompanies the display of objects underscores the "emotional component of evidence," and simultaneously instructs the viewer that such material is to be mourned, rather than critically interrogated.

As I read through these files, positioned as a white, female researcher, I could not help but be completely interpellated by the stories. I could imagine the pain of the family and friends who lost loved ones. I could imagine the fear of being trapped and knowing death was imminent. I could imagine what it might have been like to be one of few to escape and the relief, guilt, and anger wrapped up in surviving such an

²⁷² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories," 11.

event. I believe that my reaction to these objects and narratives is exactly the response that they were intended to elicit. Through a strong emotional component, one is invited (perhaps even coerced) to personally identify with the narrative supposedly embodied in the object – this is the affective power of the archive, which has distinct racial implications.

While personalizing objects is a common museum practice, it is also important to note that oftentimes objects are specifically collected because they cannot be associated with any one person's individual narrative; for example, a U.S. military rifle from World War II. The rifle is supposed to stand in for the hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens who fought during the war, and the violence that the war incited. The story of the person who actually carried the rifle is often unknown, so the rifle becomes representative of an entire population. Interestingly, there are very few of these items in the September 11th collection, which is likely due to the fact that the recentness of the event and the direct help of the F.B.I. allowed for a much easier investigation of the personal information associated with each object. Despite the reason as to why this is case, the effect of this structure is quite powerful, because it creates a level of personal attachment that is often lost when an object is not attached to a specific individual. Moreover, there is such a dearth of information on the tragic personal stories of the objects that larger issues concerning politics and history completely fall out. Therefore, after one reviews the collection, one is left with such an overwhelming impression of loss and devastation that larger questions concerning why and what happened next are almost forgotten.

Another key element that must be considered within these types of personalized objects is who exactly is personalized? It is clear that there was an effort made to obtain objects relating to different class positions, including business executives, restaurant workers, administrative assistants, security staff, police, and firefighters; though Mr. Demczur's squeegee handle is the only object relating to those employees performing hard labor, and there is no mention of custodial workers, thus continuing their invisibility. While there are a number of women represented through these objects, the vast majority of the victims are figured as white, with only a few token exceptions. It is crucial to analyze the role that whiteness plays in personalizing the victims and encouraging affective response. Ruth Frankenberg explains, "Whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends."²⁷³ The ability of whiteness to function invisibly has a profound effect on the configuration of Americans. Frankenberg makes this connection clear, "notions of race are closely linked to ideas about legitimate 'ownership' of the nation, with 'whiteness' and 'Americanness' linked tightly together. Meanwhile, the repressed memory of the brownness of the original residents of this land...and of the immigrant origins of white United Statesians forms another crucial dimension of the story."²⁷⁴ Therefore, the whiteness of the victims subtly, but powerfully demonstrates their legitimacy as national victims that symbolically represent the innocence and pain of the nation, thereby encouraging mourning and sympathy for them, as well as the

²⁷³ Frankenberg, *Displacing Whiteness*, 6.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

nation. The affective power of the archive, then, produces a particular type of remembering, where to remember otherwise becomes inappropriate and also un-American, as it would potentially dishonor the lives lost and the nation as a whole.

A third centerpiece of the September 11th collection is a number of items relating to police officers and firefighters, such as uniforms (exclusively configured as male), hats, tools, equipment, and pieces of police vehicles and fire trucks. For example, one particularly poignant piece in this section of the collection is a firefighter pry bar (see image 3). The acquisition file (also reproduced on the NMAH's website) explains,

When the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center, the New York Fire Department immediately responded. Officers set up a command center in the lobby of the north tower and sent firefighters up the stairs to rescue the trapped occupants and extinguish the raging fires. When the towers collapsed, numerous trucks were crushed, and 343 members of the New York Fire Department were killed, including Lt. Kevin Pfeifer.²⁷⁵



Image 3: Firefighter's Pry Bar²⁷⁶

The pry bar, which was actually carried by Lt. Pfeifer on September 11th, appears rusted and dirty, but still completely intact, thereby representing the tragic loss of Lt.

²⁷⁵ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=64>. Accessed 2/13/12.

²⁷⁶ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=64>. Accessed 2/13/12.

Pfeifer and the many other firefighters who lost their lives – the pry bar remained, but the firefighters did not. Moreover, the firefighters serve as heroic figures that risked and often lost their lives in their duty to rescue. The heroic male firefighter is perhaps the most well-known icon relating to September 11th, and the media's role in this process of bestowing iconic status must assume center stage. The image of the heroic firefighter reinscribes common tropes of heroic masculinity in the U.S., and in many ways the firefighters come to represent the U.S. nation, which was figured as heroic, masculine, and strong in the face of tragedy. Here again, Taylor's scenario thinking becomes useful. A common, and perhaps the founding scenario in the U.S., consists of white men serving as heroes of the nation, who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of the nation. Moreover, this heroic, masculine scenario requires the rescue of victims (usually female), and the ultimate perseverance of the hero, e.g. the nation. These objects relating to heroic sacrifice bring up this scenario, and consequently imply the strength, resolve, and ultimate success of the nation; thus they demand respect and reverence, not critical examination. The lack of larger political and historical issues, together with reliance upon narratives of heroes and victims, again works to create a simplistic narrative of September 11th devoid of analysis, but rather supporting ideas of U.S. tragedy, strength, and innocence.

The last major type of objects in the collections relates to the various memorial materials. The collection contains pieces of artwork, posters, clothing, stuffed animals, and children's drawings that memorialize those who lost their lives and celebrate the rescue and recovery workers. For example, two banners were made

by school children in Kansas and Alaska to express support for the rescue workers and were displayed at St. Paul's Chapel (see image 4). The narrative in the acquisition file/website explains,

Many Americans looked for ways to help after the September 11 attacks. While most people could not travel to New York or Washington to help, many sent cards and banners of encouragement. These two banners, from the students of Oak Park Elementary School in Overland Park, Kansas, and members of the Maniilaq Association of Kotzebue, Alaska, were hung in St. Paul's Chapel. The church, unscathed despite its location next to World Trade Center, was a refuge for recovery workers, a place for counseling, a massage, sleep, or just a break from the intensity of the disaster site.²⁷⁷



Image 4: Banner from Overland Park, Kansas²⁷⁸

These children's banners and the other memorial materials represent both the innocence of the children who created them, and a sign of hope and resilience. They also subtly instruct the viewer what to do once s/he has viewed the collection. Just as these children provided their help through messages of support and sympathy, so should the viewer. This subtle instruction is reinforced by the complete absence of materials relating to the political responses to September 11th, such as the creation of Homeland Security, the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, and instigation of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As these political events are ignored in the collection

²⁷⁷ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=56>

²⁷⁸ http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/search_record.asp?search=1&keywords=kansas&mode=&record=0. Accessed 2/13/12.

in favor of objects that specifically commemorate the lives lost, the debate, conflict, historical context, and political significance become deemed as insignificant due to their absence. Therefore, without points of debate or critique, one is left to rely on scenario-thinking, in which the U.S. is an innocent victim attacked because of its inclusive democracy. Just as with the birth of the museums in the 19th Century, viewers are still taught lessons about citizenship and democracy by positioning them as grievors of the loss of life and innocence.

Conclusion

The structure that results from the objects in the different sections of the September 11th collection frames what can be known by future generations. Future generations will not find answers to questions about why, how and what came next, but instead will find only evidence of the emotionally charged stories of loss, heroism, and resilience that rely on notions of whiteness. As the Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs explained, the collection “‘is not about explaining September 11, but it is about sharing stories.’” These stories work together to effectively instruct citizens to not think critically about the causes and consequences of September 11th, but to mourn the loss of life and praise the heroes of the nation. Moreover, as a congressionally funded national museum, the NMAH has authority and legitimacy as an official institution, thereby producing cultural memory that receives the labeling of ‘official’. While what can be labeled as ‘official’ cultural memory shifts according to

different times and interpretations, one must take into account the powerful effect such a designation has in giving meaning to the past.

The powerful role that affect plays in creating an emotional connection to the victims of September 11, 2001 through the collected objects stands in stark contrast to the Hurricane Katrina collection, in which such an emotional component is absent. The following chapter compares the way in which the new methods of disaster collection were used to create a very different type of collection relating to Hurricane Katrina, which demonstrates the ways in which race is employed to shape notions of national belonging.

Chapter Four: A Second Disaster Collection - Hurricane Katrina

Introduction:

On September 8, 2005 before the flood waters had even begun to recede, key staff members at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History met and decided that the magnitude of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the extent of its effect on the entirety of the nation necessitated the creation of a second disaster collection. An email to relevant museum staff from the lead New York curator of the September 11th collection, who was assigned as the one and only Hurricane Katrina collector, explains the rationale for the creation of a Hurricane Katrina collection:

NMAH curatorial staff met informally on Sept. 8th to discuss whether or not Katrina merits our attention. The scale of the disaster, its national impact, and the social, political, and economic consequences of Katrina were seen as sufficiently significant to warrant a measure NMAH collecting response as a cross-divisional collecting initiative. Not all natural or man-made calamities will rise to this level of importance, but our experience with 9/11 gave us an understanding of the opportunities that arise for artifact-based history in such circumstances and the risk of delay [sic].²⁷⁹

This statement demonstrates that the museum still sees the necessity in immediately collecting objects relating to the disaster as they are evidence of *history-in-the-making*; and the very nature of the disaster means that the objects will likely be gone forever if they are not immediately collected.

Despite the use of similar guiding principles relating to the particular qualities of the newly established disaster collection methods, a number of distinct differences

²⁷⁹ This individual will now be referred to as the Hurricane Katrina curator to protect anonymity. Hurricane Katrina curator, email message to museum staff concerning upcoming trip to Gulf Coast, September 19, 2005.

emerged that speak to the centrality of racial difference in shaping the content and configuration of the Hurricane Katrina collection and its museum archive. This chapter tracks the development of the Hurricane Katrina collection by comparing it to the major characteristics of the September 11th Collection. It is through this comparison that important differences emerge that demonstrate the significantly divergent level of identification with the disaster victims that each collection solicits, which ultimately produces different notions of national belonging. The differences in the Hurricane Katrina collection include: (1) material organization, (2) the collection's goal of collecting materials relating to its "ethnic scope", (3) the use of photography, (4) the lack of personal information relating to collected material. The net result of these differences is a Hurricane Katrina collection that lacks the same affective connection that is produced in the September 11th collection, thereby failing to memorialize the Katrina victims in the same way.

Access and Organization

In order to begin this analysis of the Hurricane Katrina Collection, it is important to discuss the collection's organization and the access I was given to its content. As described in the previous chapter, I was given quick and unfettered access to the September 11th Collection's acquisition files. The material in the collection was extremely well organized with substantive personal information relating to the person who once owned the collected material. The Hurricane Katrina acquisition files, on the other hand, required significantly more effort to gain access

to them. Additionally, they were not very organized, and appeared to be incomplete and confusing. Although, I requested access to the Hurricane Katrina files immediately upon my arrival at the NMAH, I was not afforded access until my very last day at the museum (over two months later). I was told by a number of curators that the Katrina files were difficult to locate, largely due to the unfortunate and untimely passing of a key member of curatorial staff, who was a lead figure in the collecting efforts for the September 11th collection, and the sole curator for the Katrina collection. While I can only imagine that this loss was both personally and organizationally difficult for the NMAH, I find it perplexing that no one was assigned to the collection or tasked with organizing and cataloguing the acquisition files. Moreover, I was not made to view the Katrina acquisition files in the archival reading room, as I had been with the September 11th collection. Rather one museum curator pushed aside his personal books and papers off an extra desk in his office, and told me to work there. As I sat researching the Katrina files in the crowded room devoid of the extreme orderliness and panoptical gaze of the curators and security cameras in the reading room, I began to wonder if the material in these files was ever meant to be read or if it was in some way made to be forgotten. I found my answer as I left that crowded room after my one and only day furiously going through the acquisition files, when a curator joked with me as I walked out – “I bet now you know more about the Katrina collection than anyone in the museum.”²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Additionally, they noted that I was the only researcher that had requested to see the Katrina acquisition files, which they gave as additional reason that it was hard to give me access to the files.

Moreover, it is important to note that Congress did not pass any Bill appointing the Smithsonian as a national repository for Hurricane Katrina artifacts, nor did it allocate any funds for such a collection; there is not an online component detailing curators thoughts and feeling regarding the process of collecting the material; and there were not any surveys conducted gauging public opinion surrounding the collection or potential exhibit; in fact there are no plans to have an exhibit relating to Hurricane Katrina. I argue that this stark difference in the basic attention given to the two archives reveals significant information regarding the value of each collection, which clearly indicates which event is more worthy of remembrance and more central to American history.

The Hurricane Katrina Collection's 'Ethnic Scope'

After the NMAH decided to create a second disaster collection by collecting materials relating to Hurricane Katrina, they also decided to follow a timeline of the disaster similar to September 11, 2001. The Hurricane Katrina curator explains, “objects are falling into three categories: hurricane damage, hurricane survival, and hurricane recovery.”²⁸¹ Just as had been the case with the September 11th collection, such a timeline minimizes attention to the causes of disaster, which leads to the centering of the impact of the devastation. In the case of the September 11th collection, focusing on the devastation meant centering the emotional impact of the

²⁸¹ Hurricane Katrina curator, email message to museum staff concerning upcoming trip to Gulf Coast, September 19, 2005.

lives lost. However, the same goal of focusing on the devastation of the disaster of Hurricane Katrina led to a different outcome. This difference was a result of a number of factors, but mainly the collection's goal of capturing the "region's ethnic scope" and the over reliance on the use of photography at the expense of personal stories relating to the collected materials.

Whereas the aim of the September 11th collection was to create a representative collection of a number of iconic objects, the objective of the Katrina collection was, as the Hurricane Katrina Collection's curator describes in a Trip Report, "to acquire artifacts with rich stories, good durability, evidence of Katrina, and broad representation of the event's regional and ethnic scope."²⁸² This last objective of collecting a "broad representation of the event's regional and ethnic scope" marks an important difference between the two collections, which simultaneously reveals the subtle and interrelated roles of race, national identity, and memorializing that are at work in these disaster collections. It is significant that the objective of the collection is to collect the *region's ethnic scope*; such careful wording has a number of critical functions. From the very outset it positions the collection as having more of regional significance than a national one, thereby already distinguishing it from the same type of national importance that was so glaring as to make it obvious in the September 11th collection. Furthermore, the regional distinctiveness is based on the area's *ethnic scope*.

²⁸² Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collection Committee, October 6, 2005.

In their foundation text, *Racial Formations in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, Omi and Winant reveal the ways in which the concept of ethnicity came to stand in for the category of race after World War II. Because the biological basis of racial distinction had been significantly criticized as racist and untrue, ethnicity became the primary mode for speaking about difference. Ethnicity was understood “as the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent. ‘Culture’ in this formulation included such diverse factors as religion, languages, ‘customs,’ nationality and political identification. ‘Descent’ involved heredity and a sense of group’s origins, thus suggesting that ethnicity was socially ‘primordial,’ if not biologically given, in character.”²⁸³ Importantly, however, ethnicity was based on a European model of assimilation, where as long as members of different ethnic groups worked hard and were patient they would eventually be equally incorporated into American society. Of course, such a model ignores the racialized structures of power built within the state’s system, and also positions African Americans as a homogenized ethnic group, thereby neglecting the role of slavery in shaping their racial status.

Therefore, collecting material relating to the region’s ethnic scope, positions those affected by the storm as different from and “other” to a common American identity, i.e. white. Again comparing the Katrina Collection to the September 11th Collection also emphasizes this difference. The September 11th Collection makes no mention of the region’s ethnic scope, even though New York City is one of the most

²⁸³ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 15.

diverse cities in the country and is often used to symbolize the nation's immigrant beginnings. Such an omission allows the principles of whiteness to shape the collection while operating under the presumption of universal applicability. This positioning of Katrina victims as different from the common traits of (white) Americanness works to distance them from practices of memorialization, but also seems to open up space for collecting materials that demonstrate the government's ineffectual and unequal policies that caused massive failures in emergency response – a point that is addressed below.

Photography: “Capturing” Disaster Context

As the introduction explained, a distinct feature that marked September 11th and Hurricane Katrina was extensive visual representations of the two events. Together with television news coverage, photographs from media professionals as well as bystanders also played a significant role in documenting the events. With the case of September 11, 2001, the NMAH staff acknowledged this feature, but was quite reluctant to include these types of photographs in the collection, because museum collections usually house only three-dimensional objects, whose meaning and significance are thought to “speak for themselves.” The Smithsonian's September 11th self-study explains this debate; at its core were disagreements over “whether photographs should be regarded as "objects" worthy of the same care and

attention as other forms of material record.”²⁸⁴ Ultimately, the decision was made to house all photographs relating to September 11th in the photography division. Despite this debate, photography actually plays an important role in documenting the three-dimensional objects in the museum’s archives. Once the objects are collected, they are usually placed in a sterile environment with a solid color backdrop and photographed (see image 5). These photographs are then put in reference book and often reproduced on the website so that Internet users can view them. Moreover, on the Internet version of the September 11th collection, the photograph of the object was accompanied by a photograph of the person who once owned the object, thus



Image 5: Calculator recovered from the debris of the World Trade Center.²⁸⁵

reinforcing the personalization of the object. However, this use of photograph is thought to merely document the collected object, rather than giving context to the

²⁸⁴ Office of Policy and Analysis, *Three Studies of September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, 12.

²⁸⁵ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/record.asp?ID=42>. Accessed 2/13/12.

environment in which the object was collected, because objects are supposed to be allowed to “speak for themselves.” Interestingly in the case of the Katrina collection, the use of photography becomes a method for documenting the environment and larger context in which the object was collected, thereby suggesting that these objects cannot “speak for themselves.”

The director of the NMAH made the decision to send one museum curator and one staff photographer to the Gulf Coast region to collect objects relating to the disaster. This marked the first time a professional photographer had been dispatched to directly document the collecting process. Ultimately, the two men made two separate trips to the Gulf Coast, the first for one week in September, 2005 and the second for one week in December, 2005. In an email to fellow staff members, the Hurricane Katrina curator explains the purpose of sending a photographer to the site: the photographs “will capture the context in which objects are found before they are recovered, and will survey aspects of Katrina that defy object acquisition.”²⁸⁶ Therefore, the photographer was tasked with capturing and documenting the larger context in which the object belonged before it was collected (for example, see image 6). The use of photography to capture aspects that “defy object acquisition” seems to hint at a tension embedded within the idea of disaster objects, namely that although a museum object is supposed to represent a particular aspect of an event in and of itself, there is something about a disaster object that fails to fully accomplish this task.

²⁸⁶ Hurricane Katrina curator, email message to museum staff concerning upcoming trip to Gulf Coast, September 19, 2005.



Image 6: This mailbox was all that remained of a home in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward.²⁸⁷

Interestingly, this tension did not seem to emerge during the collection of September 11th objects, which speaks to an assumed self-evident nature of the significance and impact of September 11, 2001. Moreover, the detailed information on the people who once owned the objects seemed to serve the purpose of addressing the un-collectable nature of disaster objects for the September 11th collection. The Hurricane Katrina curator explains the significance of this new method of use photography in the collection process in a trip report to the NMAH Collection Committee:

The digital photography...set a new standard in artifact acquisition, in my experience. This was especially crucial in cases where a mundane object's story is nonexistent without vivid knowledge of the people who owned it and the place it inhabited. [The photographer] shot each of our seventeen objects in place and with donors when possible before they any removals took place [sic].²⁸⁸

Two important questions result from the Hurricane Katrina curator's comments: what is the significance of having a visual representation of the context in which the object was collected? Furthermore, does this feature a/effectively produce a different

²⁸⁷ <http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/aroundthmall/2009/08/hurricane-katrina-the-recovery-of-artifacts-and-history/>. Accessed 2/13/12.

²⁸⁸ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collection Committee, October 6, 2005.

sentiment as compared to the September 11th objects which are not paired with contextual pictures? The following section addresses these questions through an analysis of a number of important objects that were collected.

Objects of Disaster

The use photography to capture the context of the disaster that defied acquisition together with the objective of representing the region's ethnic scope did lead to the inclusion of materials relating to non-white communities, and also opened up space to document some of the many government failures. However, the lack of personal information relating to the collected material also had a lasting effect, especially as disaster archives effectively perform a memorial function. The lack of personal information to accompany these materials ultimately creates a distancing, rather than an identification, between the viewer and the human victims of the disaster, in which the victim is the land, the environment, and the city, rather than personalized individuals who represent the nation. The emphasis on the land and the environment, rather than the personalized stories of loss also works to distance viewers from their own culpability or at least acquiescence to the system of inequality that made such devastation possible. As Clyde Wood explains, "The Katrina tragedy was a blues moment. The legitimacy of the United States is dependent upon multiethnic and multiracial cooperation at home and abroad, yet it affirms its status as the architect of a new world order by denying the existence of racism. Katrina has exposed both the absence of social justice and the futility of this 'plausible

deniability' dance."²⁸⁹ Moreover, despite this attention to documenting the region's "ethnic scope" none of the objects make reference to the racialized geopolitics of the region that caused a disproportionate number of African Americans to lose their homes, be unable to evacuate, and be dislocated. In fact, very few of the objects actually address the African-American community at all. The following section demonstrates this difference in structure through an analysis of a number of the collection's central objects including: a back brace of a Mexican day laborer, a fishing instrument from a Vietnamese-American fisherman, a poster demanding Justice after Katrina, a hand-made sign questioning government inaction, a sign and mailbox from the Lower Ninth Ward, and a piece of a levee wall.

During the second collection trip, the Hurricane Katrina curator was given specific direction by his supervisors to collect an object relating to the labor provided by migrant Latino workers. Latino migrant labor was and has been a controversial topic in New Orleans, because of issues concerning who should be allowed to do the recovery work needed to rebuild the devastated region. President Bush illustrates this debate concerning who has the "right" to work in the rebuilding effort in a speech he gave to the Republican Jewish Coalition shortly after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. He states, "I've proposed Worker Recovery Accounts to help evacuees be prepared for the jobs that are going to exist in *that part of the world*. Listen, there's going to be a construction boom *down there*. We want *people from that part of the world* being

²⁸⁹ Woods, "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?," 1005.

prepared to take on those jobs.’”²⁹⁰ President Bush’s rhetoric accomplishes a number of key political moves that distance the Gulf Coast from the national imaginary in just a few short sentences. First, he brackets off the Gulf Coast as “that part of the world,” thereby implying that it is more a foreign land than an integral part of the United States. Next, he refers to the victims of Hurricane Katrina as “evacuees” from “that part of the world,” rather than as citizens or as Americans. Again this underscores, the ways in which the victims of Hurricane Katrina were distanced from the national imagination, and simultaneously implies that there is some “other” un-American population “out there” waiting to steal jobs away from the “evacuees.” As the Katrina collection makes clear, this “other” population was Latino undocumented workers positioned as threatening invaders.

In an email to the Hurricane Katrina curator concerning what types of objects should be collected in his second trip to the Gulf Coast, the Division Chair states, “The Mexican story has become very important. Ideally we should collect a worker’s tool belt and fake papers, realistically you might find something of interest.”²⁹¹ This institutional mandate contains a number of racialized notions of national belonging. First, “the Mexican story” works to homogenize an extremely complex and diverse Latino population into a singular national identity as Mexican. Second, the direction to collect a worker’s tool belt and fake papers implies that all Latinos are undocumented, hard laborers, and un-American.

²⁹⁰ As quoted in Jenkins, “‘People from That Part of the World,’” 470. Emphasis in original.

²⁹¹ Division Chair, email message to Hurricane Katrina curator, November 3, 2005

The Hurricane Katrina curator complied with this instruction, and the racialized orders therein, by collecting a back brace from a Mexican immigrant working in the New Orleans area. The narrative associated with this object is stated in the acquisition file as follows, “Rebuilding: Katrina’s winds had barely calmed before signs went up offering hurricane damage clean-up and house gutting services. Mexican immigrant Francisco Zuñiga (pictured in image 7) wore this back-support



Image 7: Mr. Francisco Zuñiga wearing his back brace.²⁹²

during his quest for Katrina clean-up work.”²⁹³ This particular narrative seems to imply that other Mexican immigrant men like Mr. Zuñiga were somehow waiting to take advantage of the devastating experience of the victims of Hurricane Katrina in order to make a profit. This implication relies on very old and well-established tropes that position racialized immigrants, especially Latina/o immigrants, as somehow

²⁹² <http://www.historyoftechnology.org/eTC/v47no2/shayt.html>. Accessed 2/13/12.

²⁹³ In acquisition file as “Treasures – Katrina (11/06 – 2/07).”

taking advantage of the U.S. economic system at the expense of American citizens, thereby posing a threat to the cohesion and success of the nation-state. Nicole Trujillo-Pagán notes this trope as she argues that in the wake of Hurricane Katrina the “media excluded Latinos from its characterizations of evacuees and racialized the Latino population as invaders...and ‘an army of aliens.’”²⁹⁴ Such framing reveals the ways in which “Latinos came to embody many anxieties about how New Orleans would recover” and had the effect of “reintroduc[ing] Latinos as a demographic and cultural force that threatened the city’s ability to duplicate itself as it had before the disaster, and imposed a homogeneous understanding of Latinos as low-wage workers.”²⁹⁵ Through the collection of Mr. Zuñiga’s back brace, the NMAH reproduced precisely these anxieties and racialization in the space of the archive, which is further evidenced by a newspaper article from the *Los Angeles Times*, entitled “La Nueva Orleans,” which was in the acquisition file.²⁹⁶ The article mentions President Bush’s suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act, which had required government contractors to pay prevailing wages, together with the suspension of prosecution of employers who cannot provide citizenship documentation for their workers. Moreover, the article largely advocates for some type of legal status for the undocumented immigrants, mainly Latina/o, who are performing the hard work of rebuilding New Orleans. However, the byline seems to suggest quite the opposite

²⁹⁴ Trujillo-Pagan, “From ‘Gateway to the Americas to the’ Chocolate City,” 95.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁹⁶ Rodriguez, “La Nueva Orleans.”

with the fear-mongering sentiment that, “Latino immigrants, many of them here illegally, will rebuild the Gulf Coast – and stay there.”²⁹⁷

The back brace of Mr. Zuñiga is supposed to represent the larger issue of the relationship between disaster recovery and immigrant labor, but actually demonstrates the way in which racialized thinking informs the acquisition process, which does its own important labor in constructing notions of national belonging. Moreover, the back brace seems to imply that citizenship is somehow a necessary precondition for experiencing and recovering from the disaster. This same issue was also at the heart of the September 11th recovery project, where a great number of the clean-up crews were composed of immigrants, who now possess debilitating diseases due to the nature of working with the debris from the World Trade Center. However, no object in the NMAH collection even vaguely hints at this, which leads to the idea that to even pose questions of citizenship would have somehow devalued the memorial work of the collection that projected a particular image of the U.S. nation-state, in which whiteness and American subtly converged as one. On the other hand, it was not only deemed appropriate, but also necessary to include objects that worked to allude to issues of citizenship and race in the Hurricane Katrina Collection, thereby implying that to document the “region’s ethnic scope” entails questioning citizenship. Because ideals of national belonging in the United States hinge on citizenship status, questioning one’s citizenship undermines the idea s/he belongs to the nation.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Therefore, the collection not only completely denies Latina/os existence as Katrina victims, but also removes them from the national imagination.

Another important object in the collection relating to this topic was a fishing device donated by Mr. Sang Nguyen (see image 8). In a trip report to the Collection Committee, the Hurricane Katrina curator relates his story of going to the Vietnamese-American community situated near Biloxi, Mississippi:

On the gangplank leading to the vessels we met Mr. Sang Nguyen...Katrina had destroyed his Biloxi house and two cars. Nguyen is a 1975 immigrant from South Vietnam...On the bridge, while searching for something to collect, I noticed a cardboard dial nailed above the wheel, inscribed with Vietnamese characters. This was his net timing device. He was persuaded to donate this one and make a new one for charting the hours his shrimp nets sit in the gulf's waters.²⁹⁸



Image 8: Vietnamese immigrant shrimper Sang Nguyen and his shrimp boat Miss Brittany²⁹⁹

Mr. Nguyen's net timing device then is supposed to represent the Vietnamese-American community, who was also significantly affected by Katrina. The

²⁹⁸ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collection Committee, October 6, 2005

²⁹⁹ <http://hurricanearchive.org/object/1619>. Accessed 2/13/12.

acquisition file did not contain any additional information or a narrative about the Vietnamese-American community, thereby subtly implying that this immigrant community was somehow not as suspect as the Latino community.

The inclusion of an object relating to this small Vietnamese-American community of 35,000 people³⁰⁰ spread along the Gulf Coast may seem a bit surprising given the larger processes of racialization that I have argued undergirded the collection process. However, when this object is contextualized within the media's framing of Hurricane Katrina, the rationale behind its inclusion in the collection becomes clear. Eric Tang explains that as the full picture of the government's mismanagement and incompetence became clear, the media could no longer exclusively rely on blaming "the underclass," so they "began to 'go positive' by telling stories of the people who did get out – and who did so without the least bit of government assistance."³⁰¹ The Vietnamese community became the focus of a number of these "positive stories"³⁰² regaling "their uncanny ability to 'get out' by drawing upon a combination of ethnic solidarity, war-tested survival skills and their trusted shrimping boats."³⁰³ Thus, Tang concludes, "from Katrina's toxic flood waters resurfaced the model minority, a much-needed elixir for those unable to stomach the hard truths coming from the regions' hardest hit Black communities."³⁰⁴ The term "model minority" was first coined in the 1960s by academics "to refer to Japanese Americans," and now is usually applied to a homogenized Asian-American,

³⁰⁰ Tang, "Boat People."

³⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰² See also Leong et al., "Resilient History and the Rebuilding of a Community."

³⁰³ Tang, "Boat People," 8.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

middle-class who are lauded for ability to raise themselves “up by their bootstraps, in contrast to ‘nonachieving’ minorities like the African Americans and Hispanics. Thus Orientalist discourse construct[s] Asianness as the model or embodiment of the desired human capital of diligence, docility, self-sufficiency, and productivity, and as a model to be emulated by other minorities.”³⁰⁵ Moreover, this trope of Asian Americans as model minorities is part of a larger system of racialization that celebrates “minorities” who best assimilate and model practices of whiteness, while castigating and villainizing all those who do not. Therefore, by not questioning Mr. Nguyen’s citizenship status and emphasizing that he not only owns his own boat, but is already in the process of rebuilding without any government help, Mr. Nguyen and his net-timing device are positioned as a model minorities in contrast to Mr. Zuñiga and the larger Latino/a community he is made to represent.

Both Mr. Zuñiga’s back belt and Mr. Nguyen’s net timing device demonstrate the complexities of the processes of racialization built into the Hurricane Katrina collection’s project of capturing “the region’s ethnic scope.” Moreover, they demonstrate the lack of any collection of personal documents as supplemental materials, which was the prevailing practice in the September 11th Collection. Part of the justification for using photography as a collection method for the Hurricane Katrina collection was that due to the magnitude of the devastation, the original owner could not be determined; however, with both of Mr. Zuñiga’s back belt and Mr. Nguyen’s net timing device the previous owner was clearly known. Nonetheless,

³⁰⁵ Ong, “On the Edge of Empires,” 763–4.

photographs are still used and largely stand in for a richer story regarding the real lives of these two individuals. Moreover, the photographs do not show any of the material wreckage associated with Katrina. In both cases, one sees male immigrants of color in poses that emphasize their labor – construction and fishing. The lack of personalized stories or even photographs of the material devastation that the two individuals face produces little emotional connection. Instead their roles as male immigrant laborers are emphasized, which distances them and the communities they are made to represent from notions of U.S. citizenship and national belonging.

The collection also contained material, notably two signs, which demonstrated the contested political space that marked the disaster area. The first sign contains a colorful graphic style that reads, “JUSTICE AFTER KATRINA: The people must decide! NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US IS FOR US.”³⁰⁶ This poster alludes to the many issues involved in who was going to be allowed to create plans for how New Orleans would be rebuilt, and what it would look like once the plans were completed. There are many plans in place that destroy almost all affordable housing in New Orleans in order to pave the way for high-end tourism. The results of such plans have devastating results for the culture and diversity of New Orleans, and this poster demonstrates the many groups working to stop such action.³⁰⁷

The second sign was hand-made by the LeBeouf family (see image 9). The Hurricane Katrina curator writes, “Entering southern Terrebonne Parish, we encountered high water in the side streets, and along one lane a large sheet of

³⁰⁶ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collections Committee, December 23, 2005.

³⁰⁷ Lowe and Shaw, “After Katrina.”

plywood spray-painted ‘HAVE WE BEEN FORGOTTEN.’ We turned into Rouen Street and met with the soaked LeBeouf family and saw their water-logged homes.’³⁰⁸ This sign alludes to the many problems involved with the government’s (both national and state) recovery efforts. The government was slow to respond and uncoordinated, which led many, such as the LeBeouf family to go without drinking water and electricity for months while they tried to repair their home and re-make their lives in the devastated area.



Image 9: The Sign on Rouen Street, with LeBeouf Family, sign made by Roy Rowley (not in photo).³⁰⁹

There were also many issues involved in how the government (national, state, and local) responded to the September 11th attacks, such as a lack of ability to communicate that the Towers were structurally unstable and the fact that the planes were never intercepted by the military. These problems, among others, were what

³⁰⁸ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collection Committee, October 6, 2005

³⁰⁹ <http://hurricanearchive.org/object/1451>. Accessed 2/13/12.

prompted the 9/11 Commission Report.³¹⁰ However, objects relating to these issues of government accountability are absent from the September 11th collection, which effectively suggests that such issues were either nonexistent or at the very least unimportant. Again this speaks to differing assumptions about U.S. nationhood, where the September 11th collection suggests that the U.S. was simultaneously victim and hero, while the Hurricane Katrina collection suggests that the U.S. may have been at least partially responsible for the extent of the devastation of the disaster.

A careful reading of this photograph and sign also sees the racial and geographical implications. Many of the people living in the surrounding areas of New Orleans, such as the Terrebonne Parish, faced a similar level of destruction as compared with New Orleans. However, they did not receive a fraction of the media attention as New Orleans, and were also very slow to receive aid and repair of utilities. This often led to a certain degree of animosity toward New Orleans' residents. Additionally, many middle class white neighborhoods were also hit hard by the storm. While some of these neighborhoods did receive help from governmental services and insurance companies, many in these communities believe that their hardships were not represented in the media and consequently will be forgotten. Moreover, another subtle element of entitlement exists in this photograph. For instance, who has the right to demand to be remembered, and how does this rely on the expectation of being included and served? In other words, how much of the anger of the LeBeouf family has to do with the fact, as a white middle-class family,

³¹⁰ Agathangelou and Ling, "Power and Play Through Poisies."

the LeBeouf's had never before been forgotten, and so they have the right to demand inclusion, whereas an immigrant family may not dare to make such a claim.

The Hurricane Katrina curator notes upon visiting the lower Ninth Ward, an area that was completely decimated by the flood waters and home to a working class, and mostly African-American community, that he discovered a sign that would complement the LeBeouf's sign. The curator explains,

Enroute we paused at a business pleading with local authorities. 'PLEASE GIVE US ELECTRICITY,' their hand-painted sign said. I got out and spoke with Karl Barrett, owner of Urban Organics, who agreed to offer us the sign after he received electrical current from Entergy, the local utility. The sign might make sense for us to have, supplementing the 'Forgotten' sign from Houma with this urban cry for help."³¹¹

In addition to this sign from a local business, the curator collected a destroyed mailbox (see image 6), and an iron-workers tool from a skilled mason who worked in the neighborhood. The Hurricane Katrina curator explains, "It was obvious to us that this entire area would demolished by heavy machinery in pretty short order. The idea of any of these homes being salvaged was out of the question. Our mailbox, the iron ornament, and the marked window would live on to help represent his community."³¹²

It is interesting that these three items (the sign asking for electricity, the iron-workers tool, and the mailbox) are supposed to represent the complete loss of a community, and the political, historical, and racial reasons that led to such a result. These items do little to demonstrate the fact that the community was largely African-American

³¹¹ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collection Committee, December 23, 2005.

³¹² Ibid.

and low-income, a result of the geopolitics of power.³¹³ While the Lower Ninth Ward is certainly included in the collection, any real engagement with these larger historical and political questions gets washed away.

Three pieces of the London Avenue Canal were also collected, and work to represent the tragic impact of the flaws with government designed infrastructure. The London Avenue canal stretched along the Gentilly District, which is an upscale district in the New Orleans area. The Hurricane Katrina curator explains,

Such pieces of wall will permit us to speak with authority about all aspects of the levee failure in New Orleans. The soft soil beneath this wall was a factor in the failure, as was the depth to which the steel pilings were driven. But soil and pilings are hard to collect. The reassuring concrete levee flood walls were the most visible aspect of the levees and they failed dramatically, flipping over like playing cards before the weight of the lake.³¹⁴

The Hurricane Katrina curator's narrative demonstrates the inadequacy of construction of the flood walls, and subtly implies that *even* upscale and wealthy areas experienced destruction as a result of poor government planning.

There also seems to be a certain level of criticism embedded in the documentation of the collecting effort. For example, the Hurricane Katrina curator writes in a Trip Report, "Throughout Gentilly we began to see a new life form amid the dead trees and brown median grass: plastic yard signs on sticks, by the thousand, advertising hurricane clean-up services, house-gutting, mold removal, tree-cutting, and bio-hazard remediation."³¹⁵ Then in a Shipping Report he notes that "these signs are evidence of that unquenchable American zeal for turning anything into a business

³¹³ Potter, *Racing the Storm*; Camp, "'We Know This Place'"; Simmons, "Justice Mocked."

³¹⁴ Hurricane Katrina curator, Shipping Request to Collections Committee, February 2, 2006.

³¹⁵ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collections Committee, December 23, 2005.

opportunity.”³¹⁶ The Hurricane Katrina curator seems to be subtly presenting a critique of U.S. capitalism that works to make a profit from everything, even disaster and the very real tragedy faced by hundreds of thousands of people. In the same Trip Report, the Hurricane Katrina curator writes,

The week of our arrival FEMA Disaster Recovery Center staffs in New Orleans had been directed to remove their blue FEMA-imprinted shirts in public, so as not to arouse residents. I requested one of these shirts, which a FEMA supply clerk...was glad to provide. (Fruit of the Loom, made in Honduras). He also gave us a handsome DHS (Dept. of Homeland Security) sport shirt, marked ‘Hurricane Katrina.’ (Velocity, made in Pakistan).³¹⁷

It is interesting that he chooses to make a note of where the clothing was made, information that he chose to leave absent in the other clothing he collected in the Gulf Coast, as well as with objects relating to the September 11th collection. Therefore, he seems to be leveling a criticism on FEMA for not having U.S. made clothes, together with using funds to buy such fancy shirts that had no real purpose. Of course, it was FEMA who became the poster-child for government failure as they were almost unilaterally faulted with amplifying the level of chaos and devastation in the recovery process.³¹⁸

Despite this subtle criticism of government waste and incompetence, none of the objects collected actually work to address the larger structures of inequality based on class, race, and gender that caused massively uneven vulnerability to the destructive forces of the hurricane, flooding, and governmental neglect. Therefore, the NMAH’s collecting goal of capturing “the region’s ethnic scope” seems to work

³¹⁶ Hurricane Katrina curator, Shipping Request to Collections Committee, February 2, 2006.

³¹⁷ Hurricane Katrina curator, Trip Report, to NMAH Collections Committee, December 23, 2005.

³¹⁸ Kish, “My FEMA People.”

within established multicultural frameworks that point to racial difference without interrogating or challenging what such racial difference means in real political and historical terms. Moreover, the collection fails to address other aspects of the “region’s ethnic scope” that would have unsettled dominant notions of citizenship and belonging by their mere inclusion in the *National Museum of American History*, including most notably any attention to the region’s many and varied Native American communities. Collins explain,

Louisiana is home to many Native Americans (both federally and nonfederally recognized) from around the United States; however, state-recognized groups, such as the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw of Louisiana’s Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, Choctaw-Apache, Clifton Choctaw, Four Winds Tribe Louisiana Cherokee Confederacy, Pointe-au-Chien Indians, and the United Houma Nation, and federally recognized tribes and nations, such as the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, and Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe of Louisiana, comprise the descendants of Louisiana’s original and diverse Native American population.³¹⁹

Many of these tribes, among them the Pointe-au-Chien and the BCCM, are not federally recognized as “official” Indian tribes. As the introduction explained, this denial and negation of existence by the federal government continues the colonial project of Native genocide by denying these tribes crucially needed funds and resources to recover from the devastation wrecked by the hurricanes. In 2005, it was estimated that “4,500 Native Americans lost everything in southeastern Louisiana during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.”³²⁰ Despite the fact that these Native American communities were severely impacted by the hurricanes, the NMAH made no effort to

³¹⁹ Collins, “Missed by the Mass Media,” 44.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

collect materials relating to their struggles. Their complete absence from the Hurricane Katrina collection continues the disavowal of their existence through their continued invisibility in the historical record and national memories. As the conclusion will explain, this making of absence is another way in which archives function to support (neo)colonial projects of the state. Therefore, the implementation of new collection methods in the creation of disaster archives do not open up possibilities of “recognizing” systems of inequality that led to increased hardship and devastation for working class communities of color or challenge practices of historical documentation that support these same inequalities, but rather these methods reaffirm the dominant structures of knowledge and belonging that privilege whiteness while purporting to collect material of national significance that “speaks for itself.”

The Power to Collect

A careful reader may be curious as to why the majority of the evidence for the support of this argument draws from the narratives, emails, and reports written exclusively by the Hurricane Katrina curator. However, there is a very distinct reason as to why this is the case, the Hurricane Katrina curator had almost exclusive authority over what to collect. Of course, he was bound by the whims of the NMAH Collection Committee who must give final approval before an object was officially acquired by the museum and other practical concerns such as shipping and the size of objects. Nonetheless, it was his opinions concerning which objects properly

represented Hurricane Katrina that determined what was and was not collected. The Hurricane Katrina curator hints at this fact, though he does not directly acknowledge his power in the process of collection. He explains, “Disaster collecting is an inexact science. In a field of destruction, what is worthy of a museum’s care to make the disaster real for us and for generations to come? The selection process is daunting and yet, objects do exist to make the storytelling possible.”³²¹ The intent of the this chapter is not to judge which of the Hurricane Katrina curator’s opinions were valuable and which were not, but rather to demonstrate that one person’s opinions and feelings have extraordinary power in determining what becomes a part of a national history museum and what is left out.

Though he did not directly acknowledge the power he had in collecting and framing *history-in-the-making*, the Hurricane Katrina curator did have the foresight to put his emails, narratives, reports, and even his personal hand-written journal into the acquisition files. This fact is particularly poignant, because, as previously mentioned, the Hurricane Katrina curator unexpectedly passed away in November of 2008. The level of detail that he put into the acquisition files helps to document the influential role of the curator in the collecting process, and how similar collecting methods can produce rather uneven results.

³²¹ Hurricane Katrina curator, personal narrative by concerning his trip to New Orleans, no date.

Conclusion

Despite the increased attention to representing the contextual complexity of Hurricane Katrina, there is a glaring absence in the acquisition files, which was actually glaringly present in the September 11th collection. The Hurricane Katrina acquisition files lack the personal narratives associated with each object. Whereas the September 11th collection had extensive documentation of personal documents, such as eulogies, birthday cards, and even grammar school report cards, the Hurricane Katrina collection seems to replace these personal narrative items with professional photographs of the collected object in its material environment. While there are likely many practical reasons that may have led to the difficulty of capturing personal stories, e.g. the massive displacement of the people themselves and the chaos and devastation of the disaster, the effect of this absence is lasting. It seems that the visual representations from the photographs are made to stand in for the personal stories. While the photographs do demonstrate the utter material and environmental devastation of the area, the lack of personal stories makes the event less personal to someone who was not intimately connected with the event. Therefore, the photographs do not create the same level personal identification as do the personal stories.

I am not arguing that photographs are not important in giving meaning to an event; rather I acknowledge their centrality in our modern world, especially as they enable “particular forms of agency in relation to various historical traumas across the

globe.”³²² As many scholars in trauma studies and performance studies argue, including Diana Taylor and Marianne Hirsch,³²³ individual photographing was essential to witnessing September 11th, 2001, helping many to assert their agency in the midst of an overwhelming and unbelievable situation. However, these were not the type of photographs that were collected for the Hurricane Katrina collection. Rather, I am drawing attention to the particular type of work that photography is accomplishing in the NMAH’s Hurricane Katrina collection. The collection allows photographs of material devastation devoid of human subjects or human subjects devoid of material devastation to stand in for personalized material that works to tell the story behind how a particular object came to land in a particular place. If the objective of the collection is to tell stories through the collected objects, then the type of stories that can be told through photographs of environment alone is limited. Without additional material, such as letters, family photographs, and identification cards – the very ephemera material that was collected for the first time together with more traditional objects in the September 11th collection to represent the denied possibility and destruction of individual lives – then the actual story that can be told is limited at best. As a result, while the Hurricane Katrina collection does gesture towards the complexity of the event with the inclusion of a more diverse community, the lack of supplemental material that gives personalized stories, together with the collected objects that operate within dominant racialized discourse that measures

³²² Guerin and Hallas, *The Image and the Witness*, 4.

³²³ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Hirsch, “I Took Pictures.”

“others” against norms of whiteness, effectively distance those affected by Katrina from the national body of the U.S.

While the new disaster collecting methods implemented in the September 11th collection produced a memorial in which both the victims and the heroes were figured as white and were highly individualized, thereby encouraging the viewer to identify with the victims as national heroes that required respectful mourning, the similar methods led to a different outcome with the Hurricane Katrina collection. In the Katrina collection, the devastation of the environment and city was privileged at the expense of any significant individualization of the victims. This practice of granting individuality to white individuals, while homogenizing an entire population of people of color is a key feature in practices of racialization.³²⁴ Moreover, the only heroic figures who were represented in the Katrina collection involved Humane Society volunteers who rescued lost and hurt domesticated animals. As a result, there is a significantly different level of affective power of the archive, because the viewer is not made to digest personalized items of loss of life and family, as was the case in the September 11th collection. I am not, however, trying to advocate for a more affective approach in archives in general or the Hurricane Katrina collection more specifically, but rather to demonstrate that reading these two disaster collections alongside one other, allows for a fuller picture of what the viewer, figured as a citizen-subject, is instructed to learn from these archives. Taken together the two collections rely on a very old type of scenario-thinking that is highly racialized. This familiar scenario

³²⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

teaches the viewer, what s/he in many ways already knows given the historical, political, and institutionalized racism in the U.S. – whiteness grants one the power and privilege of being an individual whose life is not only more highly valued, but actually representative of the nation, whereas the absence of whiteness does not afford the same level of individualization, and ultimately respect. Thus, the viewer/citizen-subject is instructed to mourn and remember the lives lost and the pain of the nation with September 11th, but instead taught to distance him/herself from “that part of the world.”

Chapter Five: Archive of the Future: The September 11 Digital Archive

Introduction

In early January 2002, four months after the attacks on September 11th, the September 11 Digital Archive came online with the goal of using “electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the history of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania and the public responses to them.”³²⁵ The birth of the September 11 Digital Archive marks one of the first attempts to digitally collect digital materials. Moreover, it constitutes a digital form of disaster archiving, which strives to capture the general population’s thoughts and feelings relating to the event by collecting all submissions contributed to the site. These unique qualities offer an opportunity to analyze disaster archives in the digital realm as well as investigate how the space of the Internet is used to produce notions of national belonging. Therefore, this chapter outlines the birth, implementation, organization, and content of the September 11 Digital Archive noting the ways in which notions of national belonging are configured. In the proceeding chapter, this analysis will then be compared to an investigation of a similar digital archive relating to Hurricane Katrina – the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank.

I argue that the content of the September 11 Digital Archive not only demonstrates the impact of the media’s framing on public perception, but more

³²⁵ <http://911digitalarchive.org/about/index.php>. Accessed 12/18/2011.

importantly how the public becomes interpellated to (re)produce these narratives, thereby contributing to the nation-building project of creating strict boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In the end, the “public response” to September 11, 2001 consists of an outpouring of emotional messages including shock, horror, fear, sadness, and prayers for the victims that positions these victims as central to notions of national belonging. In order to unpack the relationship between nation-building and digital archives, the chapter (1) gives a brief history of the emergence of the September 11 Digital Archive (2) outlines the collection efforts and its institutional directions, (3) describes the digital archives that privileges the individual submissions, and (4) analyzes the affective power of the individual submissions in producing notions of national belonging.

Origins of the Digital Archives

The September 11 Digital Archive was exclusively funded by the Alfred P. Sloan foundation,³²⁶ which distributes funding based upon the idea that “a carefully reasoned and systematic understanding of the forces of nature and society, when applied inventively and wisely, can lead to a better world for all.”³²⁷ According to one of the co-directors of the September 11 Digital Archive, in 1996 the Sloan Foundation became interested in pursuing a digital record of science and technology,

³²⁶ The Sloan Foundation was founded in 1934 by Alfred P. Sloan Jr., then-President and CEO of General Motors. However, it now is “an independent entity and has no formal relationship with the General Motors Corporation,” which it is careful to point out on its websites. (<http://www.sloan.org/pages/1/about-the-foundation>)

³²⁷ <http://www.sloan.org/pages/1/about-the-foundation>. Accessed 3/15/10.

which was growing exponentially. At first, they funded oral history methods to accomplish this goal, but were disappointed by its cost and methods, which they believed were becoming outdated.³²⁸ Therefore, they decided to fund historians who would pursue a new methodology of digitally collecting history. This initiative is significant as it marks one of the first steps towards providing funding for what would be digital archives that collect digital material.

The Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University became the first organization funded by this new initiative through its “Blackout History Project” begun in 1998. This Project “invited visitors to complete a lengthy on-line survey and asked contributors to provide a phone number so that a longer oral history interview could be conducted on the Northeastern blackouts in 1965 and 1977.”³²⁹ In early 2001, the Sloan Foundation also began to provide funds to CHNM for a project entitled “Exploring and Collecting History Online” (ECHO). This project “is a portal to over 5,000 websites concerning the history of science, technology, and industry...ECHO is also a first step into the field of digital history: since 2001 it has been a laboratory for experimentation in this new field, and it fosters communication and dialog among historians, scientists, engineers, doctors, and technologists.”³³⁰ The ECHO project’s collection and exhibition technology has served as the blueprint for many other digital archives dedicated to collecting digital material, and therefore has particular clout within the field.

³²⁸ Personal Interview with Managing Director of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. 2/19/09.

³²⁹ Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

³³⁰ “Guide to Everything Echo.” Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. <http://echo.gmu.edu/node/5211>. Accessed 3/15/10.

Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, the Sloan foundation contacted CHNM to see if they would be willing to begin another project dedicated to capturing “the public response to 9/11 and its aftermath captured in e-mails, digital images, online diaries, and other electronic media are preserved for posterity.”³³¹ The CHNM jumped at this opportunity as they believed that September 11 marked a unique historical event that for the first time had a distinctly digital aspect in need of preservation. Peter Stearns, Provost of George Mason University and editor of the influential *Journal of Social History* explains that over 100 million Americans sent emails in the few days after September 11, 2001; however,

[There] ‘is a tremendous risk that a substantial amount of this information will be lost. A portion has certainly already disappeared as email messages and other digital records are purged from computer hard disks. The historical record of September 11 is in danger of being obscured as time softens our memories and as other ‘high-profile’ developments in war, diplomacy and politics focus our thoughts elsewhere. Even after the passage of only a few months, the amount of social and cultural information we’ve lost is significant -- not just the emotions and experiences of that day, but those beyond the specific tragedy itself.’³³²

Mr. Stearns comments demonstrate that a key characteristic of the digital aspect of September 11th is that it is inherently vulnerable, and therefore in need of immediate collection. Moreover, an Internet archive also allows for instantaneous access to such material. One staff member of the Digital Archive notes, “future historians will no longer be limited to leafing through whatever newspaper, diaries, and letters that happened to survive intact. Instead, they’ll have instant access to a rich digital

³³¹ PRNewswire, “A. P. Sloan Foundation Grants \$700,000 to Preserve Electronic History Of September 11, 2001.”

³³² Ibid.

archive of Sept. 11.”³³³ As explained in the introduction this unique digital element is referred to as “instant history.”

In order to capture this “instant history,” the CHNM partnered with the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at City University of New York’s Graduate Center to create the September 11 Digital Archive. As explained on its website, the September 11 Digital Archive “uses electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the history of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania and the public responses to them.”³³⁴ Moreover, Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, two key figures in the project, explain that their aim was “to collect—directly from their owners—those digital materials not available on the public Web: artifacts like email, digital photographs, word processing documents, and personal narratives.”³³⁵ Two other key designers of the archive explained in a personal interview that they considered the September 11 Digital Archive to be “the archive of last resort,” so they must collect material that was not being collected by larger databases.³³⁶ Therefore, as the archive’s creators explain, the September 11 Digital Archive was dedicated to using digital technology to collect digital material, a distinct aspect that marked a new method of collection.

³³³ Cox, *Flowers After the Funeral*, 20.

³³⁴ <http://911digitalarchive.org/about/index.php>

³³⁵ Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*.

³³⁶ Personal Interview with Executive Director, American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, The Graduate Center and Co-Principal Investigator for September 11 Digital Archive and Assistant Professor of History, John Jay College, City University of New York and Managing Director, September 11 Digital Archive. 3/4/09. These two officials are hereafter referred to as CUNY staff members.

For examples of these other databases, see September 11th Web Archive, September 11, and Television Archive: A Library of World Perspectives.

The September 11 Digital Archive (and also the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank) are based on the premise that they must collect all material submitted to the website with the only exception being overly offensive comments or spam (i.e. unsolicited electronic bulk messages). The Managing Director of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University explains that the September 11 Digital Archive had a very liberal collection policy. They collected everything, but would not post online “extreme racist, anti-Semitic, or lewd” contributions, though these contributions were stored for future research purposes, and “only accounted for about one percent of the total” contributions.³³⁷ The Digital Archive staff felt that this policy was essential “for the public record, and so they were not going to judge what was and was not important.”³³⁸ Such an expansive collection policy runs counter to the established collection methods in physical archives, in which archivists selectively piece together material from a distant past that may be culled from private collections, family heirlooms, or government records. This challenge to normative collection principles is one of the reasons, as chapter two explained, that many have heralded Internet archives as a much needed democratic force within the archival realm. Ekaterina Haskins argues, “unlike traditional exhibitions, where the curator often exercises full control over the selection of materials, the September 11 Digital Archive epitomizes inclusiveness, which is made possible in no small degree by the interactive capacities of electronic media.”³³⁹

³³⁷ CHNM Managing Director, 2/19/09.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Haskins, “Between Archive and Participation,” 406–410.

This liberal collection policy also resulted in the establishment of new category of material. CHNM Managing Director explains that because they collected virtually everything, they ended up receiving material that “included a lot of fakes – stories that were lies, falsified documents and photos.”³⁴⁰ These “fake contributions” also included what became labeled as “digital folk art”, in which contributors would interlace multiple pictures or insert a picture of themselves next to the World Trade Center, for example, through the use of digital techniques, such as Photoshop (see images below).

While these were clearly doctored materials, the Digital Archive staff such as,



Image 10: Mert In NY2³⁴¹

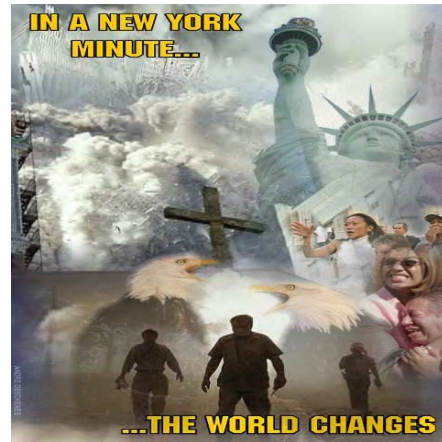


Image11: NEWYORK MIN-3³⁴²

nonetheless, considered these contributions important because they represented a form of “memorial art.”³⁴³ Of course, knowingly collecting falsified materials is a practice that is usually highly frowned upon within the archival field, because it is

³⁴⁰ CHNM Managing Director, 2/19/09

³⁴¹ http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_object.php?object_id=33377

³⁴² http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_object.php?object_id=32792

³⁴³ Ibid.

seen as destroying the authenticity of the archive.³⁴⁴ However, CHNM's Managing Director stressed that the staff did collect the IP addresses of all contributions, so that they had documentation of where the contribution came from; therefore, as he explained, "theoretically [one] could verify the information, but that is the job of historians."³⁴⁵

This same sentiment is echoed on the September 11 Digital Archive's webpage. At the bottom of each individual submission is a highlighted question: "How do I know that this item is factual?" When one clicks on this link, she is brought to a page that has a series of questions about how to contribute to the collection, and what is appropriate to contribute to the collection. Additionally, there is an answer to the question regarding factualness of the submissions -

Every submission to the September 11 Digital Archive -- even those that are erroneous, misleading, or dubious -- contributes in some way to the historical record. A misleading individual account, for example, could reveal certain personal and emotional aspects of the event that would otherwise be lost in a strict authentication and appraisal process. That said, most people who take the time to submit something to the September 11 Digital Archive share the goal of its organizers -- that is, to create a reliable and permanent record of responses to the 9/11 attacks -- and therefore most contributions are authentic. Nevertheless, as with any historical sources (including, for example, newspaper accounts), there are always questions about reliability, and all researchers need to evaluate their sources critically. It is for this reason that the Archive harvests metadata from every contributor -- including name, email address, location, zip code, gender, age, occupation, date received -- and suggests that these metadata be examined in relation to one another, in relation to the content of the submission, and in relation to other authenticated records. Sound research technique is the basis of sound scholarship.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ MacNeil and Mak, "Constructions of Authenticity."

³⁴⁵ CHNM Managing Director, 2/19/09.

³⁴⁶ "Frequently Asked Questions." <http://911digitalarchive.org/about/faq.html#q11>. This important point was of central discussion in Barbara Abrash's "Digital Democracy, Digital History: '9-11 and After.'" *Radical History Review*, 93 (Fall 2005): 96 – 100. However, significant changes have been made to the site since her publication, which I discuss in the body of the paper.

The emphasis on the collection of IP addresses and the website's focus on the rationale of their collection methods³⁴⁷ work to position Internet archives as possessing the same degree of historical authenticity as physical archives, rather than questioning the tenuous assumptions upon which such claims of authenticity are based. As chapter two explained, what makes an object "authentic" is not some intrinsic value, but rather the process by which it was collected.³⁴⁸

At the end of 2003, the September 11 digital archive no longer actively collected submissions, and began the transfer of ownership of the collection to the Library of Congress, though they still maintain the updated version of the website. While this may seem like a simple transition that would guarantee the preservation of the digital archive by being housed at the Library of Congress, it actually raises serious practical questions regarding the storage of digital materials. Rosenzweig explains some of these practical concerns that often get overlooked in celebratory readings of digital archives. He states, "acid-free paper and microfilm last a hundred to five hundred years, whereas digital and magnetic media deteriorate in ten to thirty years...Well before most degrade, they are likely to become unreadable because of changes in hardware (the disk or tape drives become obsolete or software are

³⁴⁷ Interestingly, this information is no longer easily accessible on the new version of the website, which the staff implemented when they transitioned out of their active collecting phase in 2003, which suggests either that these new methods of digital collection are becoming established within the field and no longer in need of direct explanation and justification or that the archival team now wants to downplay these changes, effectively pushing them to dusty backroom shelf of the digital archive, which is just as, if not more, easily accomplished in a digital archive as it is in a traditional archive .

³⁴⁸ Blouin Jr, Francis Xavier and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*.

organized in a format destined for an application program that no longer works).”³⁴⁹ Stephen Nichols also notes this very same problem concerning rapid changes in software, “As each new version or format is created of such information, should libraries retain the earlier versions for purpose of possible historical comparison? Should they only preserve the ‘information’ or should they preserve the form of presentation as well? Will libraries not only preserve information but also manage museums of obsolete technology?”³⁵⁰ These concerns are very much present in the September 11 Digital Archive.

The complete transfer of the September 11 Digital Archive to the Library of Congress was successfully completed in 2008. However, two CUNY staff members note that though they handed over all the hard drives to the Library of Congress, the actual content cannot be viewed by researchers yet. Because many of the submissions were created with now antiquated software, they cannot be viewed with contemporary software unless it is specifically retrofitted for newer computers. Therefore, the Library of Congress must decide to keep and maintain older computers or solve this technological problem of retrofitting software, which comes with considerable cost and would be a recurring problem for each piece of digital material it houses. They also note that as time progresses, it will be increasingly difficult to view the digital folk art and photographs on the Internet version of the archive, because users’ home computers will not have retrofitted software that complies with the out-of-date technology. Thus, despite the idea that digital archives escape the

³⁴⁹ Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance?,” 741–742.

³⁵⁰ Nichols, “An Artifact by Any Other Name: Digital Surrogates of Medieval Manuscripts,” 136.

deterioration problems of paper archive, they nonetheless have equally, if not more, problematic issues in storage and usage.

Collection Efforts and Institutional Directions

Despite these issues concerning storage capabilities of digital archives, the September 11 Digital Archive has been deemed a resounding success by a number of historical institutions, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),³⁵¹ and also received extremely favorable press reviews.³⁵² This stamp of success is largely due to the number of items in the archive: “150,000 digital objects, including more than 40,000 personal stories and 15,000 digital images”³⁵³ and its open collection policy. The extent of the site’s acclaim led the Library of Congress to select “it as its first significant ‘digital acquisition.’”³⁵⁴ The large number of contributions has led to the idea that the archive represents an accurate snapshot of the U.S. population’s sentiments in regards to the events of September 11, 2001. Ekaterina Haskins demonstrates this common understanding, “in its sprawling totality, this collection of stories, images, and points of view reflects the unsettled and still evolving quality of public memory of the 9/11 trauma.”³⁵⁵ However, I argue that in order to truly get an adequate ‘snapshot’, one must consider what led to this large number of contributions. In other words, the

³⁵¹ http://www.unesco.org/education/aladin/paldin/pdf/course02/unit_02.pdf

³⁵² Mihm, “Everyone’s a Historian Now.”

³⁵³ Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

³⁵⁴ Mihm, “Everyone’s a Historian Now.”

³⁵⁵ Haskins, “Between Archive and Participation,” 411.

digital archive's collections goals and organization directly affect its content, as the following section demonstrates.

While the technology of the Internet certainly opens the door for increased contributions, the question becomes who exactly is able to enter through that door? Barbara Abrash also notes this critical point, "as the events of September 11 become history, the question is: Whose History will it be? What will count as evidence? Will it represent the subjectivity of those who lived it? Here, archives and the ways in which they select, organize, and display their holdings play a crucial role."³⁵⁶ Ignoring these critical questions of access has serious consequences. As Internet archives are increasingly understood as an accurate representation of the population, those peoples and communities, who do not have access or feel because of historical and present issues of cooptation and marginalization that Internet archives are not the space for their voices, will be effectively erased. Therefore, if dominant ideas begin to emerge from those with the time, computer access, and Internet navigation knowledge to contribute to the archives, then the contestation and difference will fade from the cultural memories of the event. Insight into how contributions were solicited helps to further interrogate these issues concerning access and representation.

The significant effort that was put into the creation and maintenance of the September 11 Digital Archive was made possible by the large sum (\$700,000) that the Sloan Foundation gave to the project. However, this funding came attached with

³⁵⁶ Abrash, "Digital Democracy, Digital History," 98.

important directives that steered what type of materials were collected and the methods used to collect them. This ultimately led to disagreements among the different partners in the project and directly affected the content and structure of the Internet archive. Studying the impact of these tensions on the archive's construction is crucially important, because as Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg explain "those with authority over an archive can literally determine for users what is 'better forgotten'."³⁵⁷ Therefore, tracing the creation of the structure of the archive reveals what becomes included in the archive and what (or who) is left out.

Two scholars at the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at City University of New York's Graduate Center (CUNY), who were key members of the archival team, detail some of the major disagreements. They explain that the CUNY side of the project "had a history of working with working class people, and they were concerned with those people who did not have access to digital material."³⁵⁸ They began an effort to collect Arab-American newspapers in Arabic and online Latino news articles in Spanish. Additionally, as contributions began to arrive at the website, they became aware that only certain communities were submitting contributions to the archive, so they wanted to reach out to those communities who did not have significant access to the Internet. They tried to accomplish this by putting computers in schools in the lower East side of New York City and trying to forge connections with local non-profits. However, the Sloan Foundation was not particularly concerned with these issues of representation in the

³⁵⁷ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, viii.

³⁵⁸ CUNY Staff members, 3/4/09.

archive; rather they wanted to collect as much online material as possible, as quickly as possible. Therefore, many of the efforts that the CUNY members made to reach out to underrepresented communities were either shut down or funneled to smaller groups who were collaborators in the project, but were not directly funded by Sloan.³⁵⁹ One member of the CUNY teams sums up their disagreement as follows: “For Sloan, it is the power of digital collecting, for us; it was the ability to use digital techniques to make the collection as inclusive as possible.”³⁶⁰

Related to the ultimate goals of the method of digital collecting is this issue of publicity. While the September 11 Digital Archive accepted nearly all submissions to the site, in 2001 the idea of a digital archive was just being born. Therefore, contributors had to be solicited through various forms of publicity. The need for publicity in order to create material for an archive is, in and of itself, a new phenomenon in the archival field. CHNM’s Managing Director explains that in 2001 “blogs were just beginning” and “uploading items was also new at the time”.³⁶¹ Therefore, the staff of the Digital Archive had to publicize the archive in a number of different arenas, including radio, news, schools, and museums. He further notes that their ultimate goal was to “capture voices of ordinary people.” While they were happy to work with families of the victims and workers – in other words, those directly affected, they were actually more interested in “ordinary people around the

³⁵⁹ One of these projects was “Ground One: Voices from Post-9/11 Chinatown,” which created a number of oral histories from members of the Chinatown community located mere blocks from the site of the World Trade Center. <http://911digitalarchive.org/chinatown/>

³⁶⁰ Executive Director 3/4/09.

³⁶¹ CHNM Managing Director, 2/19/09.

world – the social response – the general experience of the aftermath.”³⁶² Of course, the question of who these “ordinary people” actually are remains, especially considering the Sloan Foundation was not interested in reaching out to underrepresented communities.

Key members of the CUNY staff provide an interesting insight into the actual dynamics of this “social response.” They explain that “for the first year that the 9/11 digital archive was running we didn’t get a whole a lot of contributions”, which they think is a function of how they collected the material.³⁶³ For the first year, they relied on their own social networks of leftist academics and artists, so the contributions reflect these liberal and leftist ideas; however, around the first anniversary of September 11, 2001, there is “a hard shift to right.”³⁶⁴ They attribute this significant change in the content of the submissions to the increased publicity the Digital Archives received from major news outlets, most notably CNN. They note that the shift in ideology behind the submissions is directly related to the type of experiences discussed in the submissions. The Digital Archive “started out as evidence of direct experience, people near the towers, those who saw the towers fall, but as time went on it became extended experience – the experience of people outside of New York City.” Therefore, “in some sense the early archive was about experience and later archive was about perception and ideology, or it was an archive of New York for the first six months and national archive after that.”³⁶⁵ This ideological turn was largely a

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ CUNY Staff members, 3/4/09.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

result of increased media attention to the digital archive during the lead up to the invasion of Iraq.

Additionally, they explain that they did not expect the many highly politicized elements that became layered on the Digital Archive. For example, they cite an article in the *Wall Street Journal* the winter before the beginning of the War in Iraq that stated that the September 11 Digital Archive “manifested a popular will for the Iraq War.”³⁶⁶ However, they are quick to point out that they believe the *Wall Street Journal* article did not reflect what was actually in the archive nor did it accurately articulate the reason behind the archive’s creation. They also discuss their objection to the way in which the Digital Archive’s transfer to the Library of Congress became a ceremonial process with significant fanfare, thereby equating the September 11 Digital Archive with a memorial, rather than an archive. In fact the official acceptance of the digital archive was marked by a day-long symposium on September 11th, which was held on September 10, 2003.³⁶⁷ Therefore, they believe that the Digital Archive has been used for political purposes that were not in its original intent; of course this is not an uncommon practice with archives and museums as the Enola Gay controversy demonstrates. As a result of this shift in ideology and co-optation of the archive for conservative political ends, they explain that “much of the material they collected is dark” including digital folk art that reflects “patriotic xenophobia,” though most of the people who submitted such items requested that their submissions be reserved for legitimate researchers, thereby not open to the

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2003/03-142.html>

public on the webpage.³⁶⁸ They explain that “at end of day, it’s a bunch of lefties that put together a right wing archive.”³⁶⁹

The concerns of CUNY staff members highlight the impact of the media in shaping the narratives employed to make sense of the attacks, which, as the introduction explained, relied on frames of acceptance (or what Diana Taylor calls scenario-thinking) relating to America’s loss of innocence and a desire for retribution. The effect of this scenario-thinking on the production of notions of national belonging is explored below in an analysis of the individual submissions. However, in order to analyze how the individual contributions are situated within the larger archive, it is important to first address the overall organization of the digital archive. While the individual submissions make up a sizable portion of the archive, over a third of the archive’s content is not from individuals (95,000 objects were submitted by individuals, thus the 55,000 objects came from various organizations that either submitted the material on their own or were solicited to submit by archival staff).³⁷⁰ Because of these different types of contributions from different sources, they necessitate considerable organization, which even in the digital realm comes with a considerable amount of power, as the following section explains.

The September 11 Digital Archive’s Virtual Organization

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ The “About” page explains, “The Archive contains more than 150,000 digital items, a tally that includes more than 40,000 emails and other electronic communications, more than 40,000 first-hand stories, and more than 15,000 digital images.” <http://911digitalarchive.org/index.php>. accessed 7/31/11

The collections in the archives can be accessed in a number of different ways. When a user accesses the site, a navigation bar appears horizontally, on the top of the page, with the following categories in order of appearance from left to right: “Browse, Research, Contribute, Special Collections, 9/11 FAQs, 9/11 Links” (see image 12).³⁷¹ Working through the categories in order of appearance, when one clicks on the “Browse” category, she is brought to a page that is organized into the



Image 12: September 11 Digital Archive Homepage³⁷²

following subsections: “Stories, Emails, Documents, Images, Digital Animations, Interviews, and Audio/Video.”³⁷³ This structure of the archive’s content effectively emphasizes the individual contributions to the site in two ways. First, the content is arranged according to the format in which submissions were accepted. In other words, the materials are categorized by the accepted format of submissions: images, documents, emails, and still or moving images, or typed stories in a prefabricated

³⁷¹ <http://911digitalarchive.org/index.php>. Accessed 3/15/11

³⁷² Image 12: <http://911digitalarchive.org/index.php>. Accessed 3/15/11

³⁷³ http://911digitalarchive.org/gallery_index.php. Accessed 7/31/11.

form. Second, the individual submissions are the first subtitle to appear in most categories (see image 13).³⁷⁴ For example, the first subtitle under the “Stories” category is “stories from site visitors”. Here all stories (that is individual stories



Image 13: September 11 Digital Archive Browse Page³⁷⁵

submitted by individuals at their own volition) are housed and organized according to their contribution from latest to most recent date of submission. This type of format emphasizes the individual contributions as they are given increased weight in terms of the organization of the content and the placement of the subtitles.

The second way in which to access the archive’s content is to click on the next sequential category: “Research.” Here, the organization of the content is quite different than it is within the “Browse” category. After clicking on the “Browse” category, the user is invited to “Examine” the archive. Upon clicking on this link, the

³⁷⁴ http://911digitalarchive.org/gallery_index.php. Accessed 7/31/11.

³⁷⁵ http://911digitalarchive.org/gallery_index.php. Accessed 7/31/11

user is brought to three different pages of collections arranged largely in alphabetical order (see image 14).³⁷⁶ This type of organization deemphasizes the individual

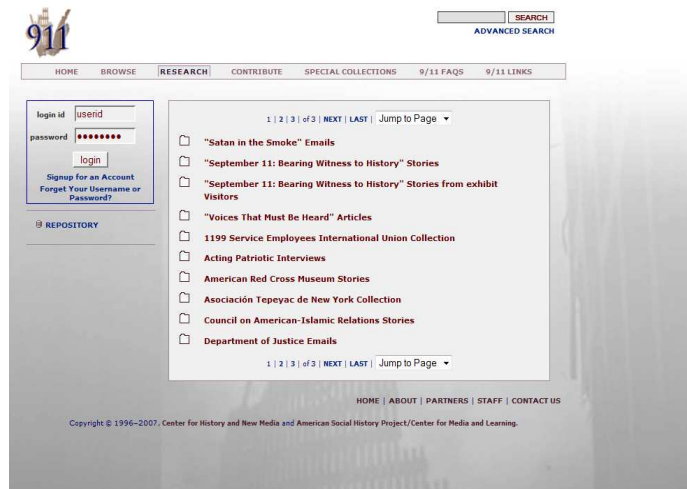


Image 14: September 11 Digital Archive Research Page³⁷⁷

submissions by placing them into five of twenty-nine collections. The individual submissions are again arranged according to the format of the contribution (“September 11 Digital Archive Digital Animations and Creations”, “September 11 Digital Archive Emails”, “September 11 Digital Archive Images”, “September 11 Digital Archive Stories”), but are in alphabetical order, thereby placing them on the last of the three pages. Therefore, a user is likely to access the other collections before viewing the last page. The other collections represent materials donated by various organizations. For example, the “Voices That Must Be Heard” collection is

³⁷⁶ <http://911digitalarchive.org/repository.php>. Accessed 7/31/11.

³⁷⁷ <http://911digitalarchive.org/repository.php>. Accessed 7/31/11.

composed of a number of news articles collected by the Independent Press Association. The archive explains,

Voices That Must be Heard was designed by the Independent Press Association staff in New York City in response to the horrifying events of September 11. After Sept. 11th, Voices focused on the South Asian, Arab and Middle Eastern communities in New York. Since February 2002, the project has expanded, selecting articles from the broad range of ethnic and community newspapers throughout the city. Here, the Archive has preserved the Voices collection from its inception until November 2002.³⁷⁸

Another collection, which appears on the first page of the “Research” category, is material relating to Asociación Tepeyac de New York. The archive explains,

The Tepeyac Association is a non-profit network of 40 community organizations, whose mission is to promote the social welfare and human rights of Latino immigrants, specifically the undocumented in New York City. Many undocumented immigrants were affected by the World Trade Center disaster. From the first hours, Asociación Tepeyac stepped in to advocate for immigrants affected by the tragedy, not only for those from the Mexican communities in New York but for immigrants from all over Latin America and other places. This collection includes a variety of materials which document some of the impact the WTC disaster has had on undocumented immigrants and it also presents some of the programs Asociación has devised to meet their needs.³⁷⁹

When a user skims the materials in the archive according to this categorization, the individual submissions are less prominent as they are placed at the end of the collection, thereby directing more attention to the collections from organizations. These organizations largely represent communities and issues that were often silenced in the mainstream media’s rendering of the events. Therefore, this significant difference in format works to create a different perception of the archive, in which the issues of these marginalized communities are given increased prominence.

³⁷⁸ http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_collection.php?collection_id=10. Accessed 7/31/11.

³⁷⁹ http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_collection.php?collection_id=18. Accessed 7/31/11.

This major difference in format creates an altogether different perception of the archive – more in line with the goals of many of the CUNY staff. In this case, the archive appears to work to give a more complete “snapshot” of the events by avoiding reinscribing dominant narratives of the events that produce a narrow understanding of the victims and heroes of the events. For example, the Asociación Tepeyac collection represents the only place where these materials are being preserved and made public. The collection contains only a handful of documents, but they are of crucial importance. The collection contains: a PowerPoint presentation explaining the work of Tepeyac more generally and specifically in the aftermath of September 11, a letter from the director (Joel Magallán), a few handwritten personal reflections from undocumented workers who were displaced after the Towers collapsed, a list of those disappeared in the Towers’ collapse, and a short biography of those who were disappeared and the stories of their family members who were working to recover from their loss. The last two documents represent an important counter to many of the dominant narratives being produced by many physical archives, including the Smithsonian.³⁸⁰

As explained in the introduction, Asociación Tepeyac estimates that nearly 100 undocumented workers were killed in the Towers’ collapse. Because of their undocumented status, the fear of family members residing in the U.S., the distance of family members who still resided in their home countries, and the increased emphasis

³⁸⁰ This also holds true for the collections and exhibit at New York State Museum, and the collections at the Museum of the City of New York. The specific collections included and presented at the Ground Zero Museum are yet to be determined.

on the power of employers to determine if a worker would/should have been at the World Trade Centers at the time of the attacks,³⁸¹ many undocumented workers were effectively disappeared by the Towers collapse. Asociación Tepeyac was a key advocate for the undocumented victims' families, working tirelessly to put many of the victims on the official list, so that their families could receive essential aid. The publication of the list of victims together with the personal stories of the victims and their families not only provides "evidence" of the existence and death of the undocumented workers, but also sheds light on their personal stories. The publication of their personal stories in the archive helps to preserve their memories, thereby including the presence of their absence in the larger history of September 11th, 2001. As discussed in chapter three, giving personal stories to those killed in the attacks, rather than just numbers or stark photographs of environmental devastation helps to create a personal, affective connection, which works to include them in imaginings of the US body politic. Therefore, the inclusion of the Tepeyac collection in the September 11 Digital Archive works to create more complex notions of national belonging, rather than a flattened understanding of dominant conceptions of belonging which privileges middle class whiteness.

³⁸¹ Aguirre and Quarantelli, "Phenomenology_of_death_counts_in_disasters."

Aguirre and Quarantelli demonstrate how governmental organizations and non-profits, such as the Red Cross would not grant funds to help families of the victims unless their family member was on the official death list. However, the governmental organizations of the FBI and NIST that were charged with creating this official list relied exclusively on interviews with employers regarding where and when missing employees were scheduled to be at the time of Towers' collapse. This system of review, of course, required employers to be honest about their employing of undocumented workers, which they seldom were. Therefore, it was virtually impossible for family members of undocumented workers to "officially prove" that they were in the Towers when they collapsed.

Moreover, as explained earlier, the organizational collections in the digital archive include “Voices that Must Be Heard,” which centers on South Asian, Arab and Middle Eastern communities in New York, the “Council on American-Islamic Relations,” which focuses on Islamic and Muslim American voices, “1199 Service Employees International Union Collection,” which contains articles by the largest union of healthcare employees in New York State, “The Madison Area Peace Coalition,” which chronicles email exchanges of those individuals who helped to form the coalition that opposed the use of U.S. military, economic, or political force, “Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center Interviews”, and “Service Employees International Union Stories.” These collections also work to complicate simplified notions of U.S. national belonging; however, they only represent about one-third of the archive’s total holdings. Moreover, these collections were not the element that was heralded as constituting the archive’s success, but rather the individual submissions.³⁸² As will be discussed in the following section, the individual contributions create a different impression of the archive that often relies on perpetuating dominant ideas of US national belonging that privilege middle-class whiteness by othering all those who do not subscribe to those ideals.

The third and final way in which to access the collections is to use the search engine located at the top right corner of the page. In many ways, the ability to search

³⁸² Moreover, a handful of organization collections are given their own link in the “Research” format, including Asociación Tepeyac, 1199 Service Employees International Union Collection, and the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and the World Trade Center Worker and Volunteer Medical Screening Program, which is not the case with the “Browse” format. The absence of links to these collections in the “Browse” format makes it impossible to access them, thereby effectively erasing or at the very least hiding their content.

the entire collection for a particular word or set of words represents a groundbreaking change in the manner of archival research which, at this time, is only available for digitally born collections. While in recent years there has been a significant push to digitize existing physical collections in archives and museums across the world, these digitized holdings still lack the ability to scan each piece for a certain word. Most of these materials are scanned as a copy, making them viewable as a picture, rather than a searchable document. Thus, the titles of the documents which are manually inserted by archival staff are searchable, but not the contents of the documents themselves. Digitally born materials, however, are completely searchable, thereby seemingly drastically changing the method of archival research.

On the one hand, it is possible to search the contents of every piece of material in the entire archive for a particular word. To a researcher, this seems like an incredible time-saving and power-leveling tool. In a physical archive, one has a finding aid that directs the researcher to her chosen topic. Next, after waiting, potentially for hours, for the archivist to retrieve her solicited collection, the researcher is then given a number of boxes each containing hundreds of documents, where she would then have to read each document to ascertain if it actually discussed her topic. At first glance, this issue of time seems to be alleviated by a digital archive. Moreover, because a researcher no longer has to rely on the classification system designed by archivists in the creation of finding aids, the power afforded to the archivists in organizing materials also seems to be diminished (which Gertrude

Himmelfarb laments in her critique of digital archives). However, upon closer inspection, issues of time and power still persist, albeit in different forms.

When a researcher types a term into the search engine, particularly with common topics, the search often yields hundreds of result. For example, if a researcher wanted to know about the topic of race in the September 11 Digital Archive, she would type race into the search engine. This search yields 379 results. Because of this extremely large number, the researcher must decide how to begin going through the collection. The obvious choice would be in the order that the materials appear in the retrieved search, which in this case is determined by an unknown algorithm.³⁸³ Search engines work by taking “a user's query and furnish[ing] him or her with a list of hopefully relevant documents (often ranked according to a ‘relevance score’ calculated by the algorithm).”³⁸⁴ In order to understand what criteria the search engine uses to select and rank items in the digital archive, one would first need access to the computer coding that contains the algorithm, and then the knowledge to understand how to decipher that complex mathematical formula. As most people do not have training in algorithms, the classification system of the digital archives is in some ways even more opaque than in physical archives. Therefore, the power of the organization of digital archives is not completely erased.

³⁸³ An algorithm is a complex mathematical formalization that is written into the code of the program to tell the search exactly how to sift through all the available information, and then how to rank the information that it selects as relevant. This whole process takes only a fraction of a second, and results in the lists of searchable items that user sees after s/he has typed in a search term.

³⁸⁴ Gordon and Pathak, “Finding Information on the World Wide Web,” 144.

National Belonging and Individual Submissions

As the above section explains, individual submissions represent the privileged “wing” of the digital archive. Moreover, they represent a key site where issues concerning national identity and national belonging are produced. The vast majority of these submissions come in the form of emails and stories, which the September 11 Digital Archive describes as “the bulk of the archive, representing the experiences of thousands of individuals...The recollections cover a variety of topics too great to assess, and present an excellent resource for future cultural studies of the reaction to the September 11 attacks.”³⁸⁵ One of the few scholars who has written about the September 11 Digital Archive, Ekaterina Haskins, explains, “Although scores of stories simply recall the authors’ first emotional reactions—disbelief, terror, and sympathy for victims and their families are the most common sentiments—some also go on to reflect on the meaning of the tragedy and its aftermath.”³⁸⁶ In the end, she argues, the Archive offers “a panoramic view of the fractious cacophony of public expression that cannot be accommodated by a permanent, professionally designed memorial.”³⁸⁷ While Haskins does not offer any sustained analysis of these “emotional reactions”, she does point to a number of important themes running throughout the archive. Moreover, it is this “fractious cacophony of public expression” that offers a key insight into the production of national identity that

³⁸⁵ http://911digitalarchive.org/galleries.php?collection_id=23

³⁸⁶ Haskins, “Between Archive and Participation,” 411–412.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 414.

occurred during the first few years after September 11, 2001 – a national identity that is firmly implanted in the archive.

The individual submissions are particularly revealing as they represent content submitted by “everyday people”³⁸⁸ (the target audience of the digital archive), rather than elite and/or state run archives and museums. The comments of these “everyday people,” in many ways represent the heart of the production of national belonging, as they demonstrate that national subjects themselves, rather than state elites alone, (re)produce ideas of national belonging, which as Hutchinson and Smith explain, evidences the complex interplay involved in the construction of national identity.³⁸⁹

As previously mentioned, the individual submissions are divided into four main categories: (1) stories, (2) emails, (3) images, and (4) digital animation. The bulk of these submissions come in the form of stories, emails, and images - 40,000 first-hand stories, 40,000 emails, and 15,000 images.³⁹⁰ The stories of contributors were solicited by giving users a pre-fabricated form that simply stated, “Tell us about what you did, saw, or heard on September 11th. Feel free to write as much or as little as you like.”³⁹¹ As Haskins observes, the emails and stories largely describe the authors’ feelings, which center on expressions of shock, fear of future attacks, sadness for the loss of lives, and praise for the heroes. Many of the contributions begin by giving details of their “normal” day that was then radically changed by the events of September 11th, 2001. For example, one contributor explains,

³⁸⁸ I highlight this word to again underscore the many assumptions packed into such terminology, including questions of access to technology, training, and leisure time, among others.

³⁸⁹ Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*.

³⁹⁰ <http://911digitalarchive.org/index.php>. Accessed 8/30/11.

³⁹¹ <http://911digitalarchive.org/contribute.php?type=story>. Accessed 8/30/11.

On the day of September 11, 2001 I was wearing my favorite purple dress. Like any other day I was at school, it seemed like a good day...As I was walking down the hall I saw my best friend with a panicked look on her face. She told me that two planes had flown into the World Trade Center buildings. At first I didn't believe her...As we were watching they were showing tapes of the second plane crashing into the second building. To me it still didn't seem real.³⁹²

This interruption of the “normal” is then followed by shock and disbelief. In *Narrating September 11: Race, Gender, and the Play of Cultural Identities*, Mattingly, et. al. explain that “the impossible path of the two planes and the pictures of those melting towers, shown again and again, created a horrifying instance of time lifted out of the ordinary stream of things, time set against the routine and expected, so that it achieves its own dramatic shape, its own singular form with beginning, middle, and end.”³⁹³ Such a production effectively creates the impression that there was an “ordinary” that has now irretrievably vanished. The creation of the “ordinary” works in conjunction with narratives from the Bush Administration that the U.S. was innocently going about its ordinary life, when it was brutally and unexpectedly attacked by crazed terrorists bent on destroying the “American way of life”. President Bush stated in his address to the nation on September 11, 2001 that “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.”³⁹⁴ And now, because of this brutal attack, the U.S., along with the rest of the world, will never be the same; therefore, this

³⁹² http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=19763. Accessed 8/17/11.

³⁹³ Mattingly, Lawlor, and Jacobs-Huey, “Narrating September 11,” 743.

³⁹⁴ http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?_s=PM:US

“ordinary” past is gone forever. Such a production effectively creates the impression that there was an “ordinary” that has now irretrievably vanished.

Furthermore, the fixation with the singularity of the event – its beginning, middle, and end – leads to the erasure of any discussion of the past, including U.S. involvement in imperialistic practices and proxy wars in the Middle East. Ruth Frankenberg explains this phenomenon as a process of forgetting; “it is as though all else that happened on that date is eclipsed by one set of events so significant that the rest is only relevant in relation to it.”³⁹⁵ Therefore, any past before the event of September 11th, 2001 fades into oblivion, together with blissful “ordinary”, irrevocably replaced by the post-September 11th World marked by the endless “War on Terror”.

These elements of shock and complete unexpectedness that display the loss of the ordinary are reproduced by the thousands of short emails that strikingly bear the digital time-stamp of September 11, 2001 from those near New York City and Washington, D.C. that ensure loved of their safety and others that inquire about the whereabouts of loved ones. For example,

Email Subject: I'm OK
But I can't say the same for the city. We're not really sure what all is going on right now, just that the Pentagon was hit and several other sites around the city. I can see the smoke from the Pentagon from our office. I'll be in touch.
Email Date: 9/11/2001³⁹⁶

Email Subject: Internet is the only way out

³⁹⁵ Frankenberg, “Cracks in the Facade,” 557.

³⁹⁶ http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=37666. Accessed 8/18/11.

Mom: All circuits are tied here in NYC. I'm only able to get on the Internet, I can't even get my voicemail. The entire city is in chaos and everything has stopped short. If you want to talk go on IM!!! Dan.
Email Date: Tue 9/11/2001 10:12AM³⁹⁷

Email Subject: We are worried about you and Peter and Kathy
Let us know that you're ok as soon as you possible can [sic]. We are in shock and scared and just need to know if you are ok. Libby and Lu
Email Date: 9/11/01 11:00:39 AM Eastern Daylight Time³⁹⁸

These emails which chronicle concern, shock, and fear in just a few short words all on the date of September 11, 2001 create a sense of time standing still as family member and friends eagerly awaited news of the safety of loved ones. These expressions of love and concern are certainly understandable given the magnitude of devastation caused by the attacks. Moreover, their presence in the archive creates a strong affective connection with the viewer as it easy to imagine being a family member nervously awaiting news of the safety of a loved one. Just as in the Smithsonian's archive, these strong emotional pleas have the effect of overshadowing larger political and historical questions by again perpetuating this fixation with singularity of the day as the flood of emails gain their emotional weight by bearing the time-stamp of September 11, 2001. As Mattingly, et. al. explains, "these 'first report' stories that recall early moments of shock do not challenge the public story in which an innocent is brutally attacked – the United states as the victim of the unprovoked, crazed, and murderous actions of demented foreigners."³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=36151. Accessed 8/18/11.

³⁹⁸ http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=36243. Accessed 9/4/11.

³⁹⁹ Mattingly, Lawlor, and Jacobs-Huey, "Narrating September 11," 746.

The loss of this “ordinary” past that marks the beginning of the “war on terror” is often accompanied by a newfound fear as another contributor explains,

I had just finished teaching my 7:30 a.m. English 302 (Advanced Composition) class and was at my desk for Tuesday office hours...Colleagues at NCC came ...announcing that the first World Trade tower had been struck by a plane...I remember thinking ‘Is this the beginning of the end?’...In subsequent days, I feared coming to my desk, thinking that universities would be a target for follow-up terrorist attacks. I still live with a fear, kept just below the surface, of living so close to the nation's capital [sic].⁴⁰⁰

This feeling of newfound fear was supported and amplified by a number of governmental actions including the birth of the Department of Homeland Security, the creation of the “terrorist warning system”, and the encouragement to report all suspicious behavior. Amy Kaplan explains that “homeland security” was a new word in the American lexicon, which had a powerful role in creating a sense of fear that necessitated protection through the rigid drawing of national boundaries. She states, “the idea of the homeland works by generating a profound sense of insecurity, not only because of the threat of terrorism...but also because homeland is haunted by prior and future losses, invasions, abandonments. If every facet of civilian life is subject to terrorist attack, then every facet of domestic life – both in the sense of the private life and the nation - must be both protected and mobilized against these threats.”⁴⁰¹ The tens of thousands of stories on the September 11 Digital Archive work to support these ideas of a radical departure that ushered in a new era in American history marked by a constant fear of future terrorist attacks. Moreover, it was this supposed newfound fear that legitimized racial profiling, the restriction of

⁴⁰⁰ http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=18845. Accessed 8/17/11.

⁴⁰¹ Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities: Transformations of Language and Space,” 63–64.

civil rights, and the indefinite detainment of “potential terrorists”, which effectively worked to (re)draw strict lines of national belonging as both “immigrant” and “Arab” became suspect categories and detached from American national identity.

This drawing of national boundaries is also evidenced by two main practices embedded within the material of the submissions on the September 11 Digital Archive. The first, as discussed earlier, deals with the production of affective ties, which leads to an expressed identification with the victims of September 11, 2001. The second mechanism of constructing national boundaries occurs through the production of a racialized and sexualized “terrorist other”. Many of the individual stories in the September 11 Digital Archive demonstrate an expressed emotional identification with the victims of September 11th. One contributor explains,

I was in rural town America where I live and work and raise my family when we were attacked. I stared at my desk for most of the rest of the day until I could go home and see for myself what in the world was going on. Far from the danger but still hit very hard with emotions from knowing that my way of life and the freedoms that I want for my children were being threatened. I was in total shock for weeks after 9-11 and still hurt today when I think of all the children who lost their parents, the husbands and wives who lost each other and the fact that they will never be able to replace them. I pray for them daily and hope that they know there are people who care for them and what they are going thru [sic].⁴⁰²

The language of this contributor, which is common in most contributions, invokes a sense of national kinship as s/he⁴⁰³ states, “when *we* were attacked.” S/he also demonstrates these same themes of a loss of the ordinary and a newfound fear,

⁴⁰² http://911digitalarchive.org/parser.php?object_id=5043. Accessed 8/17/11.

⁴⁰³ I use this gender ambiguity, because the metadata preserved for this entry does not contain information on the author’s name, gender, or physical location.

together with a personalized feeling of loss and mourning for the family of the victims.

These individual contributions from indirect witnesses who explain a feeling of personalized attack construct September 11th as a distinctly national disaster wherein the victims of the attacks are represented as national kin, who constitute the heart of American national identity. This affective labor⁴⁰⁴ works in tandem with the production of a “terrorist-other”, which can be seen in the digital animations contained in the digital archive. While these digital animations make up only a small fraction of the archive’s total content, they represent what Ann Laura Stoler calls “information out of place.” She describes this concept of “information out of place” as calling attention to which categories are made to matter in the archive and which ones fall out of favor, thereby providing “road maps to anxieties that evade more articulate form.”⁴⁰⁵ Within the September 11 Digital Archive, the digital animations constitute such “information out of place” as their graphic and violent content seemingly stands in stark contrast to the rest of the contributions which chronicle shock, fear, loss, mourning, and calls for contemplation and peace. Moreover, they evidence the way in which social anxieties concerning safety, fear of attack, and protection of American “values” (read whiteness) become projected on a racialized, terrorist “other”.

The “Collected Digital Animations and Creations” virtual wing of the September 11 Digital Collection contains more than seventy digital animations that

⁴⁰⁴ Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings.”

⁴⁰⁵ Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 107.

graphically depict digital stories and video games that largely present different ways to maim and murder Osama bin Laden and other terrorist figures. These digital animations demonstrate the production of an enemy-terrorist who is racialized as Arab/Muslim and portrayed as sexually deviant. Leti Volpp explains that the government's rhetoric after September 11th characterized the U.S. as embroiled in war against terrorism that was a battle of civilization, which ultimately consolidated a new racial category of Arab/Muslim. She states, "the ideological effect of this rhetoric was the legitimation of the religious and modern imperative to eradicate either from without or within the forces of despotism, terror, primitivism, and fundamentalism, each of which were coded as Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim...Through these actions and these statements, the American public was instructed that looking 'Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim' equals 'potential terrorist.'"⁴⁰⁶ This category of "potential terrorist" pulled from old Orientalist tropes to consolidate a figure with discernible characteristics that included brown skin, feminized male body, sexual deviation, and "facial characteristics of beards, dark eyes, and turbans."⁴⁰⁷

This same figure appears in the digital animations. A majority of these animations have video game features through which the user is interpellated into this process of othering through violence. For example, "Blow up Osama bin Laden," "Fry Osama bin Laden," "Kill bin Laden," "Mission Objective: Kill bin Laden," "Osama's Cave," and "Play Bitch" are just a few of the video games which give the user various weapons, such as electrical volts, nuclear bombs, guns, knives, and

⁴⁰⁶ Volpp, Leti, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," 150.

⁴⁰⁷ Grewal, "Transnational America," 547.

physical beatings to maim and eventually kill bin Laden, with varying forms of graphic images depicting blood, dismemberment, and ultimate annihilation. Interestingly, many of these video games begin with a disclaimer that these digital exercises are just for humor's sake or catharsis and should not be translated into actual violence on Arab or Muslim Americans. For example, "Bad Dudes vs. Osama bin Laden"⁴⁰⁸ depicts the player as a large muscular white man a la Arnold Schwarzenegger and enables him to beat a thin turban figured brown man with various moves exacted through a series of mouse clicks. However, it states at the beginning,

On September 11, 2001, we saw the end of innocence in America...I walked through the city of Philadelphia today and felt a new unity among American (sic). People of every race have joined together against a common enemy. Some are misguided, however, and have turned against anyone wearing a turban. We must be stronger than this. Show the terrorists that we can't be changed for the worse, only for the better. Many have said that we shouldn't change our way of life as a result of terrorist acts, so I decided I will keep doing what I love to do – and make a game that lets you beat the crap out of Osama Bin Laden.⁴⁰⁹

The author again relies on the themes of a loss of innocence and the old way of life, but asserts that some good has come from this bad – uniting across race ,against the enemy who wears a turban. In this case, multicultural rhetoric is activated in the production of the enemy-terrorist, and the author states that this is "just a game," not to be confused with reality. However, "this game" has real consequences as it works to create a racialized group that is always suspect as terrorist. This form of racialization also works in tandem with the gendering and sexualizing of the terrorist.

⁴⁰⁸ http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_object.php?object_id=1778. Accessed 8/29/11.

⁴⁰⁹ http://911digitalarchive.org/repository_object.php?object_id=1778. Accessed 8/29/11.

In *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, Jacqui Alexander argues that “varied heterosexual anxiety narratives – of violence, of injury and shame, and of punishment and retaliation – simultaneously produce the enemy and issue an invitation to the citizen patriot to attend to the propaganda mechanics of war.”⁴¹⁰ These heterosexual anxieties over the boundaries of sexuality, morality, violence, and punishment are projected onto the figure of the enemy-terrorist to make him appear as abnormal with sexually deviant tendencies. The equation between sexual deviancy and the terrorist runs throughout many of the digital animations in which Bin Laden is said to be in love and/or having sexual relations with camels, goats, and other livestock. Moreover, a number of the animations enact punishment through sodomy. For example, in one animation Bin Laden’s head is superimposed on a feminized male body, which is being sodomized by the Empire State building with the caption, “You like skyscrapers, huh bitch.”⁴¹¹ In a video game entitled “Osama bin Laden in Fist of Allah,” the user is invited to initiate the sodomization of Bin Laden by a blackened figure until eventually, the user can “finish him” by decapitating him in a guillotine.⁴¹² According to Puar and Rai, “the construct of the terrorist relies on a knowledge of sexual perversity (failed heterosexuality, Western notions of the psyche, and a certain queer monstrosity); and...that normalization invites an aggressive heterosexual patriotism.”⁴¹³ Within

⁴¹⁰ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 240–241.

⁴¹¹ http://static.911digitalarchive.org/REPOSITORY/OTHER_OBJECTS/361object.swf. Accessed 8/29/11.

⁴¹² http://static.911digitalarchive.org/REPOSITORY/OTHER_OBJECTS/144object.swf. Accessed 8/29/11.

⁴¹³ Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 117.

this heterosexual patriotism “there is an unspoken disciplining device at work:...‘If you’re not for the war you’re a fag.’”⁴¹⁴ Furthermore, the branding of terrorists as sexually deviant monsters makes them incapable of being civil or acting rationally, thereby legitimatizing their destruction. This aggressive heterosexual patriotism is precisely what is at work in these violent. Therefore, as the September 11 Digital Archive houses these spectacular and horrific images of sexualized violence, it represents one of the few, if not the only, places that the digital “mechanics of war” are actually preserved.

Conclusion

In the end, the first sustained effort to capture “instant history” in an online, digital archive resulted in the collection of tens of thousands of individual submissions that critically reveal the influence of the media and government interpretations in shaping dominant narratives concerning September 11, 2001. The individual contributions demonstrated the ways in which September 11th was positioned as a national tragedy in which those indirectly involved were nonetheless interpellated to feel a part of the tragedy by directly identifying with the “Americanness” (i.e. whiteness) of the victims. Therefore, through their submissions, these individuals help to (re)produce these notions of national belonging in the space of digital archives, preserved for posterity. However, because of the openness of the collection policy of the digital archive, it also contains information relating to

⁴¹⁴ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 241.

organizations such as Asociación Tepeyac that produce ruptures in these dominant understanding of U.S. national belonging by demanding that the undocumented workers, whose labor was so crucial to existence of the Twin Towers, be made visible and remembered. Thus, the digital dimension of disaster archives offers some possibilities of resistance to dominant notions of national belonging, while simultaneously revealing exactly how powerful and pervasive these dominant notions are, and the ways in which they are bound up with scenarios of racial, gender, and sexual difference. The following chapter demonstrates how similar digital methods resulted in a different outcome that only yielded a fraction of the individual submissions, thereby revealing a devaluing of the victims of Hurricane Katrina in national cultural memory that is largely the result of the role of race in shaping notions of national belonging.

Chapter Six: Collecting Instant History: The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank

Introduction

Three years after the September 11 Digital Archive ended the active collection phase of their project, another disaster rocked the coast of a different part of the United States. The Sloan Foundation again funded the CHNM, this time partnering with affiliates at the University of New Orleans to create a digital archive relating to Hurricane Katrina and Rita – the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (HDMB). However, similar collection methods yielded a significantly diminished return – only 25,000 submissions as compared to the September 11 Digital Archives’ 150,000. The following section chronicles the emergence of the HDMB and analyzes its resulting structure and content. Moreover, the HDMB is read in relation to the September 11 Digital Archive for two overlapping reasons. First, the HDMB represents the second effort to create a digital archive from digitally born material, and therefore offers important insight into the impact and effect of this new method of archival collection and storage. Second, as Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf shores a mere five years after the events September 11, 2001, it constitutes a another moment of crisis in contemporary U.S. history that as explained in the introduction creates a moment wherein the boundaries of national belonging are (re)constituted. Therefore, reading these two digital archives together, rather than as separate and discrete projects,

produces a more complete picture of the mechanisms involved in the production and policing of national belonging.

The bulk of the material submitted to the September 11 Digital Archive represents stories and emails from indirect witnesses, in other words those individuals who were not in New York City or Washington, D.C. or related to the victims, but rather watched the events unfold on the television from the comfort of their own homes. The result is an outpouring of emotional messages including shock, horror, fear, sadness, and prayers for the victims. On the other hand, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank contains material almost exclusively from those who directly experienced the storms - those who stayed during the initial onslaught and those who evacuated before the storms. This stark difference in content, again, demonstrates the impact of the media's framing of these two events, which becomes reflected and reproduced in the archives, thereby uncovering a powerful affective element of archives that is largely ignored within archival studies, but is central in the production of national identity. The thousands of indirect contributions to the September 11 Digital Archive reveal the ways in which September 11th was positioned as a national tragedy in which those indirectly involved were nonetheless interpellated to feel a part of the tragedy by directly identifying with the "Americanness" of the victims. Whereas, the absence of any response from indirect witnesses in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank demonstrates how Hurricane Katrina failed to be positioned as national tragedy by distancing the victims from ideas of "Americanness". In both cases, these notions of "Americanness" rely upon ideas that equate national belonging

with whiteness and heteronormativity. The consequences of the structure and content of these archives are far-reaching, because, as Blouin and Rosenberg explain, “the archive itself is not simply a reflection or an image of an event but also shapes the event, the phenomena of its origins.”⁴¹⁵ In other words, the contents and structure of these two archives effectively create enduring cultural memories of the two events, wherein these subtle but pervasive forms of racism become distinctly embedded for future preservation.

The following chapter demonstrates the affective power of the archive in constructing notions of national belonging through (1) a history of the emergence of the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, (2) a comparison of the HDMB’s collection goals, methods, and structure with the September 11 Digital Archive, and (3) an explanation of different outcomes of the two digital archives’ contents.

Constructing a “Memory Bank”

The history of how the Sloan foundation allocated funding, together with the methods implemented in September 11 Digital Collection are extremely important in understanding how the goals, and ultimately the content, of the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank were shaped. After the full reach of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina was understood, key members of the CHNM wanted to create another digital archive to record the responses to the event. Sheila Brennan and T. Mills Kelly, two CHNM staff members, explain,

⁴¹⁵ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, 2.

Soon after Hurricane Katrina roared ashore on August 29, 2005, the staff at CHNM quickly realized that we were witnessing a very significant moment in American history. Television and newspaper coverage of hurricane victims stranded on rooftops, houses blasted from their foundations along the Mississippi coast, the displacement of tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents, and the subsequent failures of all levels of government convinced us that we needed to act quickly to begin collecting the history of this terrible disaster. Hurricane Rita's arrival a few weeks later merely reinforced that we had a job to do."⁴¹⁶

This effort was able to come to fruition largely because of the collaborative efforts of Roy Rosenzweig, the director of CHNM at the time, and a professor at the University of New Orleans, who was displaced for a number months by the storms, and as a result was teaching his courses online. As the professor realized the centrality of the Internet for his students, paired with the success of his colleague's earlier efforts to create a digital archive for memories of September 11, 2001, he partnered with CHNM to create a digital archive for the purpose of capturing memories related to the hurricanes.⁴¹⁷

The Sloan Foundation also funded this collaborative effort, giving the archive \$250,000, which is approximately one-third of the September 11 Digital Archive's budget. At the outset of the project there was considerable input from the Sloan Foundation concerning the name of the archive. One CHNM staff member explains that the project staff did discuss at length what to call the archive, but "the Sloan Foundation funded this project and they were interested in memory bank," so that became the name of the project.⁴¹⁸ The staff did decide that they did not want to limit

⁴¹⁶ Brennan and Kelly, "Essays on History and New Media."

⁴¹⁷ Personal Interview with University of New Orleans Professor, 6/25/09.

⁴¹⁸ Personal Interview with the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Project Manager at the Center for History and New Media, 2/18/09.

the scope of the project to only memories relating to Hurricane Katrina, because there were so many hurricanes in the region in a short period of time (Rita and Gustav, for example).

The significant difference in the names of the two archives – September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (HDMB) – deserves some further attention, because it gestures to differing levels of legitimacy given to the two projects. While the methods employed for the two archives are quite similar (a point that will be discussed at length below), the two names suggest a significant difference. Though I argue that archives are one of many technologies of cultural memory, this is certainly not a dominant idea in the popular understandings of archives, as explained in the introduction. While many critical scholars such as Foucault, Derrida, Cvetkovich, and Stoler deconstruct the idea of the archive as an objective source of history (as discussed in chapter two), this idea is, nonetheless, still present. Therefore, the question becomes, why did the Sloan Foundation and CHNM assign the status of an archive to one project and a memory bank to another?

While the CHNM seems to suggest that the name was a stipulation of the funding, the consequence of the name is significant. Calling the repository for September 11th material an archive gives the material additional scholarly weight, marking it more reliable and important to historical inquiry. On the other hand, labeling the material within the hurricane repository as “memory” subtly gestures to its lack of reliability and significance for historical inquiry, much in the same way

that oral histories are not given as much academic legitimacy as archival material.⁴¹⁹ Memories are seen as being open to interpretation and often flawed, while archival material bears the stamp of the authority as such material made its way through the procedures of the archival institution. The distinction between memory and history has also been used to legitimate structures of inequality, in which some people's accounts of the past are treated as expert evidence – reliable and trustworthy – while other people's accounts of the past are regarded as memories vulnerable to manipulation and forgetting, therefore dubious in nature. It is this binary that supports systems of exclusion based on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class by erasing key histories – precisely what is at work in the struggles of the BCCM and Pointe-au-Chien to gain federal recognition. As the media employed principles of whiteness to the victims of September 11, 2001, while racializing the victims of Hurricane Katrina by employing notions of Blackness equated with criminality, it appears that the distinction in the names of the two digital archives is, however subtly, employing these same practices of inequality to position the respective bodies of material at different levels of authorial and consequently historical power.

⁴¹⁹ This gap has been written about by different authors and is still evidenced in the hiring and tenure advancement procedures at most universities, as oral history projects do not “count” for as much work as published material. See: Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Yow, *Recording Oral History*; Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*; Gluck, Ritchie, and Eynon, “Reflections on Oral History in the New Millennium”; Grele, “Movement Without Aim”; Gluck, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*.

Continuing Digital Disaster Collection Methods

While the goals behind the creation of the HDMB are quite similar to the September 11 Digital Archive, there are some subtle differences that speak to assumptions concerning the national impact and relevance of the two respective events. The “About Us” page of the September 11 Digital Archive states:

The September 11 Digital Archive uses electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the history of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania and the public responses to them...Our goal is to create a permanent record of the events of September 11, 2001. In the process, we hope to foster some positive legacies of those terrible events by allowing *people to tell their stories*, making those stories available to a wide audience, providing historical context for understanding those events and their consequences (emphasis mine).⁴²⁰

On the other hand, the HDMB’s “about us” page explains: “the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank uses electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the stories and digital record of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita...We hope to foster some positive legacies by *allowing the people affected by these storms to tell their stories in their own words*, which as part of the historical record will remain accessible to a wide audience for generations to come.”⁴²¹ Here an assumption about who was affected by the two events surfaces. The September 11 Digital Archive does not specify which people need to tell their stories implying that all people have a story of September 11th, and consequently were affected by it. On the other hand, the HDMB states, “the people affected by these storms,” which suggests that not everyone was affected by the storms. Again, this subtle difference is only visible when the two archives are

⁴²⁰ “September 11 Digital Archive.”

⁴²¹ “Hurricane Digital Memory Bank: Collecting and Preserving the Stories of Katrina and Rita,” <http://hurricanearchive.org/about/>. Accessed August 26, 2011.

read alongside one another, and implies a difference in attachment to the event by the American audience, where everyone is affected by September 11th, while only those in the Gulf Coast are affected by Hurricane Katrina. As will be demonstrated below, this configuration has a powerful impact on who is imagined as belonging to the nation and who is placed outside those boundaries.

The HDMB staff pursued similar methods to solicit contributions, though they also implemented a number of interesting innovations. Brennan and Kelly explain, “Our publicity efforts followed a process similar to one we used with great success in the *September 11* project. In that earlier project we had learned that potential contributors visiting the website wanted to see other contributions before they shared their own stories or uploaded other content. So, we seeded the archive with a number of detailed personal reflections and images submitted by University of New Orleans students and their families.”⁴²² However, they also understood that the scope of Hurricane Katrina was quite different than September 11th; hundreds of thousands of people were displaced by the storms and levee failures with their homes and belongings destroyed. Therefore, they implemented ways in which people could contribute that were not directly through the Internet. For example, they sent out postcards and put them in local businesses. People could write their memories on the postcards and then mail them into the HDMB staff who would digitize the information and put it on the website.⁴²³ Additionally, they created a SKYPE phone

⁴²² Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

⁴²³ Personal Interview with UNO Professor, 6/25/09.

number,⁴²⁴ where people could phone-in their oral history of the hurricanes and it would be digitally stored on the website. The UNO professor explains that he personally went to the many long lines of people waiting to file claims with FEMA, and told those waiting to call-in their stories while waiting in line.⁴²⁵

The HDMB staff also implemented unique New Orleans modes of publicity. HDMB staff printed their logo and website information on thousands of plastic cups that were thrown off of Mardi-Gras floats at the first Mardi-Gras celebration after the hurricanes in 2006. This process of throwing cups off of Mardi-Gras floats is a common practice in the festivities, and they often become prized souvenirs. However, the UNO professor notes a particular important added use-value of the cups during that year: “most people lost all of their dishes during the storm, so the cups were even more important.”⁴²⁶ (The September 11 Digital Archive also pursued localized publicity efforts as they partnered with the City University of New York and other local non-profits and put ads in local newspapers.)

The method of accepting contributions and the structure of the contributions were also quite similar to the September 11 Digital Archive. Sheila Brennan explains that the HDMB staff wanted to make all contributions viewable, so they made “no judgments about opinions,” though if those vetting the submissions for SPAM found something offensive, they would bring it to the project team for discussion.⁴²⁷ To that

⁴²⁴ Skype is a free internet telephone service.

⁴²⁵ Personal Interview with UNO Professor, 6/25/09.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Personal Interview with HDMB Project Manager, 2/18/09.

end they did not edit, correct spelling mistakes, or delete instances of cursing.⁴²⁸ Moreover, both digital archives accepted similar types of digital materials. As explained earlier, the September 11 Digital Archive invites contributors to upload emails, images, other files, or type their story in a prefabricated form. When a user clicks on the “Contribute” link on the top of the home page, she is sent to a page which states, “What would you like to add to the Archive?: type your story, cut and paste your email, upload images, documents, and files.”⁴²⁹ The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank also invites users to upload images and other files, or type their story in a prefabricated form. When a user clicks on the “add to the memory bank” link on the top of the home page, she is sent to a page that states: “We welcome contributions from survivors, first responders, relief workers, family, friends, and anyone with reflections on the hurricanes and their aftermath. You may add a story, an image, or any other digital file.”⁴³⁰

Two main differences emerge between the two archives’ method of collection. First, by not designating the audience targeted for contribution, the September 11 Digital Archive seems to suggest, again, that everyone has a September 11th story. On the other hand, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank does define an audience, which is extremely expansive, thereby working hard to explain that anyone can contribute. The effect of this difference adds to the earlier enumerated differences in goals, which again works to create alternative levels of attachment to the two events:

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ <http://911digitalarchive.org/contribute.php>. Accessed 8/27/11.

⁴³⁰ <http://hurricanearchive.org/contribute/>. Accessed 8/27/11.

where all Americans have a September 11th story, but not all Americans have a Hurricane Katrina story. This effectively distances the memories and victims of Hurricane Katrina from the U.S. national imagination. Second, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank does not specify that it collects emails. This omission would likely cause a contributor to think that contributing emails is not a possibility – a supposition that is supported by the absence of any emails in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. The lack of emails in the HDMB creates a noticeable absence. The September 11 Digital Archive contains thousands of uploaded emails, in which the vast majority bear time-stamps of September 11, 2001. These emails work to demonstrate the shock and horror that many Americans felt as they watched the events unfold on live television even if they were nowhere near New York City, Washington, D.C., or Pennsylvania. The absence of such emails relating to Hurricane Katrina, which may be a result of the failure to specify them as an accepted type of contribution or a general lack of shock or connection to the event, suggests that Katrina was not read as a personal horror by those who lived outside of the path of the storm.

However, the HDMB gave contributors a classification tool that was not present in the September 11 Digital Archive, because its technology was not in wide practice in 2001. This self-classification tool is known as “tagging”, and contributors were given the opportunity to “tag” their submission with a self-described label. The HDMB defines tagging as “a freeform way to categorize items, which is being used on a growing number of websites. A tag can refer to a general category or description,

such as ‘Biloxi’ or ‘synagogue’, or to a concept, like ‘hope’ or ‘community,’ or it can be more personal, ‘Sanford Cohen’. An item can be tagged with as many, or as few tags as seems useful to you. A tag on this site can contain more than one word.”⁴³¹

Therefore, contributors could self-catalogue their submissions. While the theory of this system of self-classification is quite interesting, as it allows for considerable influence among the contributors in the digital archive’s structure, the reality of the system is that there are so many different tags that it creates an overwhelming sense of confusion. In other words, contributors did not choose between a set of tags, but rather would label similar material differently. For example, a contributor might upload a photo of their house on Canal Street, and tag it with “Canal Street,” while their next door neighbor would also upload a photograph of their home, but tag it “home.” Therefore, there are so many different tags as to make any coherence nearly impossible. However, the theory of tagging does hold the potential of disrupting the substantial power archivists have in creating cataloguing systems as chapter two explained.

The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank’s Structure: Innovations and Limitations

While there were only subtle, though significant, differences in collection methods, the overall structure of the HDMB bears some strong differences, especially concerning navigation. The homepage of the HDMB, at first seems quite similar to

⁴³¹ “What are Tags?” <http://hurricanearchive.org/whataretags/>

the September 11 Digital Archive (see image 15).⁴³² A user can add to the memory bank, browse, view the collections, or do an independent search. The HDMB does not have a link devoted to research as did the September 11 Digital Archive, wherein



Image 15: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Homepage⁴³³

there was a significant difference between the “Browse” and “Research” categorization. This absence of a “Research” platform in the HDMB again supports its categorization as a memory bank instead of an archive, again diminishing its legitimacy and authority for historical research.

For the HDMB, the first way to access the collection is to click on the “Browse” link, which brings the user to a separate page with the following linked categories: stories, images, other files, outside links, map, and tags (see image 16).⁴³⁴ Just as the “Browse” category of the September 11 Digital Archive emphasized the individual contributions in the archive, so too does the “Browse” format on the

⁴³² <http://hurricanearchive.org/>. Accessed 9/6/11.

⁴³³ <http://hurricanearchive.org/>. Accessed 9/6/11.

⁴³⁴ <http://hurricanearchive.org/browse/>. Accessed 9/6/11.

HDMB. In fact, the “Browse” format of the HDMB already displays the individual stories on its first page, whereas the September 11 Digital Archive had a list of

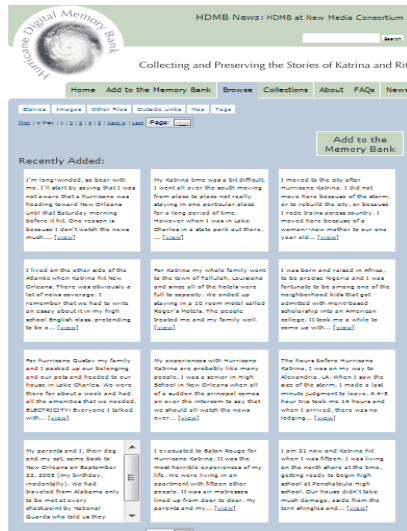


Image 16: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Browse Page⁴³⁵

categories divided by digital format wherein individual submissions were the first link to appear. Furthermore, because the other categories of submissions (images, other files, outside links, map, and tags) are in such small font, located underneath the larger categories in the archive, a user may easily skip over them. Just as with the September 11 Digital Archive, the stories appear in individual boxes, and a user can click on the “more” link to view more lengthy stories that do not fit into the opening field of view. The stories are also categorized from most recent to oldest submissions. However, it is important to note that, while the September 11 Digital Archive stopped collecting submissions in 2003, the HDMB continues to solicit and collect submissions. This important difference in timeframe again reinforces the

⁴³⁵ <http://hurricanearchive.org/browse>. Accessed 9/6/11.

fixation with singularity of the day of September 11, 2001, while ignoring both historical and future political consequences, especially the impact of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other hand, by continuing to collect submissions, the HDMB is able to capture the continuing consequences of Hurricane Katrina, as is demonstrated by small, but steady flow of contributions that come in virtually every month.

The next category that appears is “Images”. Again, the photographs are organized in small boxes on the page, in which a user can click on an image to view it in closer detail, just as is the case with the September 11 Digital Archive (see image 17).⁴³⁶ Interestingly, the number of images in the HDMB (13,700) actually rivals the



Image 17: Hurricane Digital Memory Bank Browse Images Page⁴³⁷

number in the September 11 Digital Archive (15,000). The images constitute nearly half of the overall collection in the HDMB. The overall effect of this configuration

⁴³⁶ <http://hurricanearchive.org/browse/?objectType=3>. Accessed 9/6/11.

⁴³⁷ <http://hurricanearchive.org/browse/?objectType=3>. Accessed 9/6/11.

again reinforces the way in which images of devastation have been allowed to stand in for personalized stories as was shown in the Smithsonian collections and explained in chapter four.

The remaining categories (other files, outside links, map, and tags) lack organization and coherence, thereby making them difficult to navigate. The “other files” category has a conglomeration of materials, including more photographs, PowerPoint presentations, and videos. The “outside links” category contains a number of links to external magazines, news broadcasts, and special series devoted to covering stories related to Hurricane Katrina. The “map” category shows a listing of pinpoints on a Google map, in which some contributors chose to mark where their stories or images originated. The final category of “tags” is a listing of the hundreds of tags that contributors created to categorize their own submissions. As previously mentioned, there are so many tags as to render this particular form of categorization useless. The HDMB did try to work against the grain of archival power by purposefully not subcategorizing the material beyond general types of digital format and allowing contributors to self-tag their submissions. In this way, the HDMB resisted imposing implicit narratives on the material through forms of categorization. However, because the self-tagging system largely failed, navigating through the material becomes difficult and tedious.

The second way in which to access the material is through the “collections” link. This page contains of a list of 41 collections from additional image collections, such as the Smithsonian’s photograph collection to other oral history projects to local

projects bringing awareness to the issues brought on by the storms. However, unlike the September 11 Digital Archive, the individual stories and images are not in the list of collections, but rather the different special collections. Again, these collections are not in any particular order, not even alphabetical order. Moreover, this virtual wing contains a number of activist projects that are critical of the lack of governmental coordination and response during the initial levee breaks and the subsequent rebuilding process. These projects demonstrate the real political implications and lived experiences of those struggling to over governmental and economic obstacles.

The last way in which to access the HDMB material is to use the search engine at the top right corner of every page. Because the material in the HDMB is not subcategorized as is the September 11 Digital Archive, the search engine works slightly differently. Whereas some material had a tendency to get hidden in the September 11 Digital Archive because of their categorization into special collections, the HDMB's search engine searches for a selected term in all materials. In other words, the lack of categorization and subcategorization puts all material on the same level, making it all searchable. However, there seems to be some flaws within the search engine as some searches would retrieve material that did not actually contain the selected search term. Again, this demonstrates that search engines are not always time saving devices as they have often been touted.

Framing Different Outcomes

Despite these differences, albeit subtle, in structure and collection, the CHNM and Sloan Foundation believed that on the whole they were implementing quite similar collection policies and organization structures for the September 11 Digital Archive and Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. Moreover, because of the overwhelming success of the September 11 Digital Archive, the CHNM and the Sloan Foundation were quite confident that a Hurricane Digital Archive would prove even more successful because in those five years the use of the Internet for social networking had exploded. Brennan and Kelly explain, “Our experiences with the *September 11 Digital Archive* had taught us a lot about collecting history online and so we expected that like the very successful earlier project, the HDMB would take off quickly and would rapidly become a central digital archive of original sources, many of which disappear almost as quickly as they are created.”⁴³⁸ Therefore, they reasoned that more people would have knowledge of the existence of digital archives and would have increased knowledge of how to navigate through the systems, thereby further increasing the number of submissions.⁴³⁹ Ultimately this assumption proved false.

In an essay describing the successes and difficulties of the HDMB, Brennan and Kelly explain, “To our surprise, all the national media coverage of the storm aftermath and the combined efforts of our staff here in Virginia and of our many partners along the Gulf Coast did not result in anything like the flood of contributions

⁴³⁸ Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

⁴³⁹ Personal Interview, UNO Professor, 6/25/09.

that we expected.”⁴⁴⁰ The HDMB yielded 25,000 digital objects, 1,300 personal reflections, more than 13,700 digital images, and more than 7,000 other files.⁴⁴¹ The total of 25,000 digital objects is just a fraction of the 150,000 digital objects in the September 11 Digital Archive. The Sloan Foundation was rather disappointed in this number as they directly tied the success of the project to the number of contributions. The UNO professor explains that he sees this measure of success difficult to achieve because of the very different circumstances involved with Hurricane Katrina. He states, “With Katrina and Rita, more people were directly affected, but harder to get to,” so it would be better to “judge the quality, not the quantity.”⁴⁴²

Brennan and Kelly explain the different outcomes as a matter of four inter-linking elements: “collecting content; technical issues; attracting visitors to [the] site and building trust with potential contributors; and...allowing those most directly affected time to heal before they can share.”⁴⁴³ Ultimately, they believe that if they were given more time, more staff, and more funds they would have been able to generate vastly more contributions. In a personal interview, Brennan explains, as we were “collecting after tragedy, we really needed more time, because those who were really directly affected needed time to get to the recovery side, where they were thinking beyond how to just get through the day. Even two years after the

⁴⁴⁰ Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Personal Interview with UNO Professor, 6/25/09.

⁴⁴³ Brennan and Kelly, “Essays on History and New Media.”

storms...only three-fourths of population came back,” so there were “a lot of unresolved issues.”⁴⁴⁴

While this is no doubt true for those who directly experienced the horrific events caused by Hurricane Katrina/Rita and the levee failures, it does not explain the virtual absence in the HDMB of contributions by indirect witnesses, those watching the events unfold on television for days on end – the type of submissions that constituted the bulk of the September 11 Digital Archive submissions. As the two CUNY staff members explained, September 11 Digital Archive began as repository of direct experiences with very few contributions, but then after approximately six months the digital archive grew dramatically as a result of the influx of contribution of indirect experience, from those who watched the events unfold on the television. However, in the six years of the HDMB’s existence, no such turn has occurred, and it remains almost exclusively a repository of first-hand experiences of those who suffered through Hurricane Katrina, both those who attempted to weather out the storms in their homes and those who were displaced throughout the country.

Most of the stories in the archive chronicle the author’s journey of displacement and rebuilding with a number of common themes emerging, such as the pain of losing loved ones and all material possessions, struggling with the decision whether or not to return to the New Orleans area, and a feeling of connection with other survivors. One contributor writes simply, “I lost everything in Hurricane Katrina. I’m lucky my dad even left because if he would have stayed I would have

⁴⁴⁴ Personal Interview with HDMB Project Manager, 2/18/09.

lost him. I live in New Orleans East and my house took on 7 1/2 feet of water.”⁴⁴⁵

Another writes,

We had 5 feet of water and a lot of mold...We stayed in Tallahassee for 2 years until we came home to live in a FEMA trailer. My dad stayed in Florida because his health was slowly decreasing...We had to start over from scratch. After 8 long months of rebuilding and living with my aunt, our house was finally finished...2 months later my dad died. In Florida without us. Our family is now broken living in a fully remodeled house with out the most important person we were working so hard to get home. Katrina is remembered everyday in our family with our struggles with financial burdens and the lost of our amazing father [sic].”⁴⁴⁶

These stories allow a glimpse into the sheer volume of loss in the Gulf Coast Region – more than 1,800 people died, 2,000 people were still missing a year after the storm, over 770,000 people in the region were displaced, over 300,000 homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, and the storms caused more than \$81 Billion in damages making it the most expensive hurricane in United States History, according to the National Hurricane Center.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, this loss did not occur in a single instance, but rather has been prolonged over years, continuing to this day, as many survivors have been unable to collect insurance money, have lasting health conditions brought on or exacerbated by the storms and sitting water, have gone into tremendous debt in efforts to rebuild, and have been unable to secure their same level of pre-Katrina employment.

⁴⁴⁵ Anonymous, "Untitled." *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, Object #44067 (February 16 2011, 11:46 pm)<<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/44067>>

⁴⁴⁶ Anonymous, "Untitled." *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, Object #43266 (September 09 2010, 2:33 pm)<<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/43266>>

⁴⁴⁷ Farrar, Margaret E, "Home/Sick."

Other survivors noted that in spite of the horrific conditions, residents largely pulled together and helped one another – an important narrative that often evaded most mainstream news stories. Another contributor states,

My mom was the reason we all stayed behind. She thought the water was not going to get any higher, but she was wrong. So by the third day we had no choice but to walk in all that nasty water. I felt so dirty I have never been that dirty in all my life...We saw dead bodies floating in the water, babies crying because they were hot and had no milk or diapers. The elderly passing out from the heat also it was really a sad time for New Orleans because we lost a lot in 2005 due to Katrina I almost lost my son...The storm also made people stronger and wiser, some people came together as friends that was a beautiful thing. I don't think none of us want to go through that again. That was the worse feeling of my life don't where you are going what [you] are going to eat or live. Some people decided not to return because they are tired of running and I don't blame them [sic].⁴⁴⁸

The contributor ends with a call for understanding for those who decided not to return to New Orleans. In fact, many Katrina survivors were forced to grapple with the difficult decision of whether to return or not. Another contributor explains,

I only left with what I was wearing...As a result, I lost every drawing, sketch and painting I had created up to that time and I'm still not over it... Things worked out VERY well for us, and by that I mean that we did not lose a soul out of our entire family, which is quite large on both sides... But will I come back? Probably not. I visited twice...It's not the city I remember. I lived in the 9th ward from the age of 3 to 26...There isn't much else around except grass and the look of total desolation...I was at work one day when I was living in Mesa, AZ, and looking really depressed I guess, when one of my co-workers asked me why I didn't just go to another city in Louisiana instead of moving so far away. I told her: "Once you've left New Orleans, you've left it. There's no other place like it."⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ SHANEL DALES, "Untitled." *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, Object #37122 (September 01 2008, 12:20 am) <<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/37122>>

⁴⁴⁹ Anonymous, "Untitled." *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, Object #44737 (August 11 2011, 10:26 pm) <<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/44737>>

This feeling of loss of place, or homesickness, due to irreparable changes is what Margaret Farrar refers to as a loss of “*bodily memory of place*.”⁴⁵⁰ She explains, “when we experience homesickness (a longing for a place and time that felt like home), it is a *bodily* experience; we feel – quite literally – out of place. Time, space, and loss are not abstract concepts here but are phenomenological, physiological experiences; in suffering from homesickness, we encounter the intersection of place and body. Our bodies know the difference between old place and new.”⁴⁵¹ Therefore, the loss of a home not only has material effects, but leaves a profound imprint on the body itself as a sense of place and belonging are also lost.

These stories of loss and homesickness evidence the struggle and hardship experienced by survivors as a result of government failure in securing levees, rescuing, and rebuilding. The Institute for Southern Studies published an insightful report into the actual extent of these government failures during Katrina by using the United Nation’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.⁴⁵² The report demonstrates the United States government’s wholesale neglect of these standards and failure to meet the dire needs of its internally displaced residents. The report concludes:

The U.S. government did not take adequate measures to prevent wide-scale displacement of Gulf Coast residents, including coastal protection and maintaining sound storm defense systems such as the New Orleans levees. The U.S. government did not adequately protect the rights of Gulf Coast residents during displacement, failing in many cases to prevent discrimination against the poor, immigrants and people of color, and allowing children, the

⁴⁵⁰ Farrar, Margaret E, “Home/Sick.”

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Kromm and Sturgis, “Hurricane Katrina and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.”

elderly, disabled persons and other vulnerable populations to be put in life-threatening situations. U.S. officials...[allowed] partisan politics to skew relief and recovery assistance, failing to prevent abuses by private contractors and denying displaced persons access to aid from foreign governments. Lastly, the U.S. government has not successfully upheld the rights of those displaced by Hurricane Katrina to return, resettlement and reintegration in the Gulf Coast.⁴⁵³

Given these profound government failures and heartbreaking stories of struggle and perseverance embedded within the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, the question becomes why did this disaster not elicit even a fraction of the responses from indirect witnesses as compared to the September 11 Digital Archive? Why are there almost no submissions that express complete shock of the sheer devastation, nostalgia for the way New Orleans used to be, condolences for those affected by the storms, offers to help, praise for the heroes, calls for determination and re-building, or blame for supposed culprits – all common themes in the September 11 Digital Archive? Moreover, why are there not any digital animations relating to the hurricane? I argue that the answers to these questions lie with the fact that there was a strong lack of identification with those affected by the storm, which can largely be attributed to the media’s framing of the imagery of devastation as being from the “Third World”, and their branding of those affected by the storms as ‘refugees’ with criminal propensities rather than national heroes.

In the days following the first arrival of Hurricane Katrina and the levee breaks, the mainstream mass media provided round-the-clock coverage of the desperate and horrific conditions that those who were unable to leave New Orleans

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 7.

and the surrounding region were experiencing. Just as had been the case with September 11th, millions of people watched the events unfold from the comfort of their homes. However, as the introduction explained, the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina was different, not in the use of graphic images or abhorring sensationalized accounts, but in the interpretations and the racialization of those images and accounts. Bettina Aptheker observes that “in the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina everything about the social, economic, and racial injustice of American society floated to the surface. Nothing could be hidden from news cameras on the scene; no sanitized ‘spin’ could be given to the unfolding catastrophe.”⁴⁵⁴ But as these images of deep-seated injustices “floated to the surface”, the media did spin the story by using deeply engrained racialized, gendered, and classed stereotypes that have been historically used to legitimate and naturalize inequalities.

LaKisha Simmons argues “For U.S. viewers sitting at home watching on television, the pictures of thousands of terrified citizens embodied the abject, the unbelievable...the abject creates fear because it exposes the vulnerability of the human subject by destroying boundaries between self and other.”⁴⁵⁵ I argue that the fear and disbelief engendered from seeing the images of complete devastation and death was not as much about the vulnerability of the human subject as it was about one’s complicity in allowing such a situation to occur. Such images exposed, however briefly, the continuance of the same racialized system of inequality that was displayed by news media in the Civil Rights Movement with images of water cannons

⁴⁵⁴ Aptheker, “Katrina and Social Justice,” 51.

⁴⁵⁵ Simmons, “Justice Mocked,” 478.

and unleashed dogs attacking peaceful and nonviolent protestors. The images of Katrina revealed that the United States was not in fact a “color-blind” society, because of the success of the Civil Rights Movement, but instead still a deeply racialized, classed, and gendered society that literally determined whose life was worth saving through one’s position in the hierarchy of that system of inequality. The incompatibility of this reality with liberal discourses of freedom and equality in a “post-racial” society, together with the knowledge that by not resisting such a system of inequality one is complicit in its perpetuation and therefore, even if in some small way, responsible for such death and destruction is what generated such fear and ultimately led to the re-activation of the racialized scenarios of criminality and refugee. Berger explains, “Building off the established policies and entrenched ideologies that define poor urban black populations as dangerous, both the mainstream media and neo-liberal state created a feedback loop that framed criminality as a salient paradigm for making sense of the flood-ravaged city.”⁴⁵⁶ As the introduction, explained the scenario of criminality worked to blame Hurricane Katrina victims for their situation, and simultaneously justify a militaristic response, in which incarceration became a “normal policy response.”⁴⁵⁷ The scenario of criminality worked together with the framing of Hurricane Katrina victims as “refugees” from the “Third World.”

In an important study of the rhetoric deployed by the mainstream mass media relating the Katrina disaster, Paul Mabrey argues:

⁴⁵⁶ Berger, “Constructing Crime, Framing Disaster,” 493.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 500.

The mass media repeatedly employed the label “Third World” to communicate the immediate effects of Hurricane Katrina. Kristin Gazlay, the Associated Press Deputy Managing Editor for National News, refers to the aftermath of Katrina as “Third World devastation in a First World country.” The *Times Picayune*, a regional paper, reports that “Americans watched Third World scenes play out in a beloved American city.” Evoking the imagery and memory of the Third World was a constant theme used to report the various effects and consequences of Hurricane Katrina.⁴⁵⁸

While describing the imagery of Katrina’s devastation as “Third World” could have been used to elicit shock that such conditions could occur in a supposed First-World power such as the U.S., it also worked to categorize viewers’ expectations. Cynthia Young explains the power embedded within the terminology of Third World. She argues, “the very use of the term *Third World* brings with it (among other things) a history shaped by racism, imperialism, colonialism and a ruthless capital-accumulation drive that depends in a self/other logic ultimately about the self rather than the other.”⁴⁵⁹ Because these were Third World images, viewers were cued in on what to expect – images of devastation, people of color, disorder, poverty, and a lack of government response – all common place understandings of the Third World shaped by the media’s framing.

This Third World rhetoric worked in conjunction with labeling the victims of Hurricane Katrina as “refugees.” In an insightful essay, Adeline Masquelier says that the use of “refugees” forms part of a “racialized discourse that, through its emphasis on responsibility and accountability, surreptitiously excluded poor New Orleans

⁴⁵⁸ Mabrey III, “Hurricane Katrina and the Third World,” 7.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

residents from its public, thereby helping to ‘naturaliz[e] social inequality.’”⁴⁶⁰ The terminology of refugee provokes ideas of statelessness, and reinforces Third World imagery. Mabrey writes, “In the Hurricane Katrina coverage, the people were largely described homogenously according to their demographics and the ‘refugee’ label...These poor, black refugees were described as producing acts that were criminal and violent in nature.”⁴⁶¹ This blatant racialization of Hurricane Katrina survivors relies upon a key mechanism of racism in which a few aberrant characteristics are applied unequivocally to an entire population (whether that be based on race, ethnicity, or culture), thus naturalizing them as innate.⁴⁶² As a result, “differences in skin color and obvious physical characteristics supposedly provide visible clues to differences lurking underneath.”⁴⁶³ Therefore, Mukherjee, referencing DuBois, explains “racism operates as a ‘common sense,’ as unspoken assumptions about morality and character.”⁴⁶⁴

The media’s framing has had very real affects on the American public’s perception of responsibility, culpability, and identification with the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Mabrey explains, “By telling stories that disseminated throughout the American public, journalists covering Katrina actively influenced how the hurricane was mediated to the world. Twenty-four hour media coverage, seven days a

⁴⁶⁰ Masquelier, “Why Katrina’s Victims Aren’t Refugees,” 737.

⁴⁶¹ Mabrey III, “Hurricane Katrina and the Third World,” 77.

⁴⁶² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*. Omi and Winant demonstrate how race as a marker of biology transitioned to race as a marker of culture and ethnicity in the post World War II era in the United States. While the terminology has changed, the same racist mechanisms of indiscriminately applying a few characteristics to an entire population as innate still persists.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁶⁴ Mukherjee, *The Racial Order Of Things*, 34.

week made the communication about Hurricane Katrina very important to how the public understood and reacted to Hurricane Katrina.”⁴⁶⁵ Moreover, Omi and Winant see the media as playing a fundamental role in racial formation. They explain, “The power of the media lies not only in their ability to reflect the dominant racial ideology, but in their capacity to shape that ideology in the first place.”⁴⁶⁶ Herman Gray interrogates the ways in which television shapes this racial ideology through representations of Blackness. He argues, “television representations of blackness operate squarely within the boundaries of middle-class patriarchal discourses about ‘whiteness’ as well as the historic racialization of the social order...These dominant social and cultural discourses maintain normative universes within which all other representations and marginalization of difference – race, class, ethnic, gender, sexual – are constructed and positioned.”⁴⁶⁷ Therefore, the images of mostly poor African Americans struggling to survive without any governmental support made “sense” – “a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world”⁴⁶⁸ – to an American public already used to applying ideas of criminality, poverty, irresponsibility to African Americans. These racialized images together with the rhetoric of refugee and Third World worked to “other” the Hurricane Katrina survivors, thereby distancing them from ideas of American national belonging, which rely on whiteness through the rhetoric of civic and economic responsibility, orderliness, and lawfulness as normalizing principles.

⁴⁶⁵ Mabrey III, “Hurricane Katrina and the Third World,” 11.

⁴⁶⁶ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 63.

⁴⁶⁷ Gray, *Watching Race*, 9–10.

⁴⁶⁸ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 62.

I argue that this media framing, which (re)presents⁴⁶⁹ existing notions of race, class, and gender helps to explain the lack of submissions from indirect witnesses in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. By representing the Hurricane Katrina survivors as refugees from Third World conditions and interlacing this rhetoric with racialized images, they are effectively distanced from American notions of belonging and ideas of governmental accountability. Mabrey explains, “The representation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as a Third World place disassociates them from the rest of the United States.”⁴⁷⁰ Therefore, Hurricane Katrina becomes a regional disaster almost as if it was in a distant land – from “that part of the world,”⁴⁷¹ rather than a national disaster deserving national mourning. Consequently, those same indirect witnesses who felt a sense of connection to the victims and events of September 11th and therefore compelled to tell their September 11th story, did not feel this same sense of connection to the victims and events relating to Hurricane Katrina. By relying upon racialized scenario-thinking to describe the Hurricane Katrina survivors’ conditions, the media helped to (re)shape a population and events deserving pity, not mourning. Therefore, in this case, indirect witnesses did not have their own Hurricane Katrina stories to contribute to the digital archive.

⁴⁶⁹ *Stuart Hall: Race, Media, and Representation. DVD. Directed by Sut Jhally. 1997; Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.*

⁴⁷⁰ Mattingly, Lawlor, and Jacobs-Huey, “Narrating September 11,” 34.

⁴⁷¹ Jenkins, “‘People from That Part of the World’,” 470.

Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of the September 11 Digital Archive and Hurricane Digital Memory Bank the role of national belonging, race, gender, class, and sexuality in both shaping and reflecting the digital archives becomes clear. The outpouring of individual submissions from indirect witnesses to the September 11 Digital Archive in the form of emails, stories, and digital animations, together with the structure and methods of collection of the digital archive demonstrate an affective connection to September 11th, as an event that profoundly affected all Americans and changed the course of American life. Moreover, the digital animations evidence the production of an enemy-terrorist – a figure that re-draws lines of American belonging, in which those who identified as Arab, Middle-Eastern or Muslim are firmly planted outside those boundaries.

On the other hand, the contributions present in the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank demonstrate the hardships and struggles of Katrina survivors to cope with the storm and the government's failures to help its citizens. The absence of contributions from indirect witnesses accounts for the smaller number of submissions as opposed to the September 11 Digital Archive, while simultaneously demonstrating the lack of identification with the events and the victims by the larger American public. The role of race and class are again seen in producing notions of national belonging in which victims of Hurricane Katrina, who were overwhelming working-class and African American (evidence of the geopolitics of the area) are rendered refugees fleeing from a Third World land. Such framing distances Katrina survivors from the American

imaginary and removes the events of Katrina from American cultural memory, because, in the end, it was a regional disaster, not a national one – it was there, not here – it was them, not us. These ideas perpetuate an understanding of Americanness that relies on principles of whiteness.

By unpacking the role of race, class, and sexuality in structuring American belonging and identity it becomes clear how and why Hurricane Katrina is not centered in American memory in the same way that September 11th occupies such centrality. Moreover, the differing levels of success as determined by the amount of contributions is not as much about institutional barriers, but rather evidence of the role of national belonging in shaping digital archives. Therefore, without critically analyzing the disparity in the contributions by indirect witnesses between these first two instances of digital archiving and its consequences for questions of national identity, one may gloss over or even forget the profoundly racialized, gendered, and classed society that the two events underscore amidst the increasingly celebrated multicultural rhetoric.

Conclusion: 'Recognizing' the Power of Archives

*"The claims to objectivity associated with the traditional archive pose a challenge which must be met in part by telling stories about its provenance, its histories, its effect on its users, and above all, its power to shape all the narratives which are to be 'found there'."*⁴⁷²

Introduction

This dissertation has argued that archives, and especially disaster archives, represent an important technology of cultural memory thereby constituting a complex political site where struggles are waged to give meaning to the past. Macarena Gomez-Barris refers to the larger memory field as a "memory symbolic", which she argues indicates "how the national public sphere...is mediated and constructed by state-led initiatives...and alternative forms of memory that reconstruct the past...with presentist interests in mind."⁴⁷³ Disaster archives constitute one such memory symbolic. This dissertation has shown the ways in which cultural memories of the past that rely on scenario-thinking that privileges whiteness are activated in the media, governmental discourse, and archival construction to shape notions of national belonging in the space of the newly created disaster archives relating to September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina.

Both the digital and physical September 11th disaster archives evidence the creation of personalized, emotional connections between the viewer and disaster

⁴⁷² Burton et al., *Archive Stories*, 6.

⁴⁷³ Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 5.

victims. The NMAH's September 11th collection accomplishes this through the collection of extensive personalized supplemental material relating to the person who once owned the collected object. This personal information, which is usually not collected in archives, is actually centered and displayed in the September 11th collection, thereby highlighting the emotional aspect of the object as it represents the loss of a life and a future. The purse, identification card, or tool that was once carried by an individual victim without much thought – an everyday item – now symbolizes the loss of that ordinary life, and the innocence of carrying such an object without thought. Moreover, that loss of the ordinary, everyday life is framed as a national loss by centering norms of whiteness, what Ruth Frankenberg explains as “the notion of manifest destiny, of Judeo-Christian notions of goodness and innocence, and of particular understandings of fairness and justice.”⁴⁷⁴ This loss of (national) life must then be mourned and memorialized, where posing larger political questions becomes tantamount to disgracing the dead – an un-American act of the highest degree.

The tens of thousands of individual submissions in the September 11 Digital Archive evidence this same emotional connection between the viewer and the victim, in which the loss of life is figured as national in scope, thereby affecting all Americans. The submissions chronicle feelings of sadness for the loss of the victims, despair over the loss of national innocence – the way life used to be, shock at the magnitude and suddenness of the destruction, anger at the perpetrators, and desires for violent retribution. This last strain of sentiment is evidenced by the small, but

⁴⁷⁴ Frankenberg, “Cracks in the Facade,” 568.

striking, virtual wing of digital animations in the digital archive that allow viewers to participate in enacting various forms of violence on a racialized, turbaned figure in order to “get even.” This violence, which is often sexual in nature, demonstrates the consolidation of a new enemy-terrorist from a newly racialized, homogenized group – Arab/Muslim, against which notions of whiteness, heteronormativity, and Americanness are defined. Therefore, forms of enemy-production and identification with the victims merge to create strict racialized and heteronormative boundaries of inclusion to the nation-state.

However, the open collection policy of the September 11 Digital Archive also permitted small ruptures in these borders of national belonging through the inclusion of material relating to those individuals who challenge such dominant renderings of Americanness, such as the virtual wing dedicated to Asociación Tepeyac de New York. The presence of material relating to Asociación Tepeyac and the undocumented workers killed in the attacks that it has struggled to make present despite powerful forces that work to deny their very existence disrupts the seamless equation between citizenship and national belonging.

The Hurricane Katrina disaster archives, on the other hand, demonstrate a rather different level of emotional connection as racialized scenarios that equate Blackness with criminality and Third-worldness are activated to distance the Hurricane Katrina victims from the national imaginary. The NMAH’s Hurricane Katrina collection accomplishes this through a number of striking absences as compared to the September 11th collection. First, the Hurricane Katrina collection

was unorganized and virtually forgotten in the back rooms of the Smithsonian. Second, there was no effort made to create a digital exhibition of the collection that displayed the objects or the curators' feelings during the collection process as was the case for the September 11 collection. Third, the collection holds hardly any supplemental material that documents the life of the person who once owned the object. Instead professional photographs were used to photograph the physical environment in which the object was collected. These absences, together with museum's objective of capturing "the region's ethnic scope" worked to position the victims within larger racialized discourses of national belonging that center middle-class, male whiteness as the defining characteristic of citizenship upon which all "other" characteristics are compared.

The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank represents a small space of resistance (25,000 digital objects as compared to the September 11 Digital Archive's 150,000 objects) in a larger environment that was defined by media and governmental racist scenarios that described the Hurricane Katrina victims as "entitled," "looters," and/or "Third-World refugees." The HDMB almost exclusively contains submissions from Gulf Coast residents who were directly affected by the storm. As a result, the submissions chronicle residents' feeling of community amidst the horrible conditions of devastation and neglect, guilt concerning the inability to return, struggles to rebuild, and sadness of the loss of life of family or friends. However, when the HDMB is compared against the September 11 Digital Archive, yet another absence surfaces. The HDMB contains virtually no submissions from indirect witnesses

expressing sorrow for the loss of life and innocence, anger at those responsible, or shock of the magnitude of devastation, which constituted the bulk of the September 11 Digital Archive. Such a glaring difference again demonstrates the strikingly different way in which the victims of Hurricane Katrina were figured as people from “that part of the world,” thereby distancing them from ideals of Americanness and the rights and privileges that are usually assumed to go along with them.

Therefore, analyzing the archival production processes of these two events alongside one another reveals the contradicting elements of American national belonging that mark our present moment. Contemporary mainstream American national identity – the notions taught in public schools and promoted by both the government and the media – envisions the United States as country of immigrants founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and liberty.⁴⁷⁵ Further, while the U.S. may have began on unequal ground, the founding principles have guided the great nation to become more gradually inclusive (the North won the Civil War and the U.S. was responsible for the demise of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism) until it reached the modern multicultural, and perhaps post-racial society that it is today. This form of American nationalism relies on what Diane Taylor calls “scenario-thinking” and requires the strategic forgetting of the colonial, imperialist, raced, sexed, and gendered structures that the U.S. nation-state was built on and continue to inform current power relations. The unique qualities of disaster archives that entail the immediate collection of destroyed objects and the digital collection of public

⁴⁷⁵ Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*; Greenfeld, *Nationalism*.

responses demonstrate the centrality of national identity in process of archival production, a key element that often gets ignored through more traditional and older archives, thereby allowing assumptions of archival neutrality and objectivity to assume dominance. Therefore, telling “archival stories” as Burton directs in the epigraph represents an important tool in unraveling the assumptions and power of archives, which has been the main goal of this dissertation.

Consequently, disaster archives serve as important memory symbolics that reveal the structures of power that operate in the present, which are being instantly preserved for the future. As Gomez-Barris explains, “memory symbolic can be mobilized to selectively manage history in ways that reproduce state hegemony, reinscribing national identity in the fragility after collective violence. Alternative memory symbolic, however, can challenge and cast doubt on these limited renditions by suggesting that memory-making is complex, fluid, unending, and incomplete; it can construct, rather than merely flatten, human agency.”⁴⁷⁶ While the majority of this dissertation has demonstrated how disaster archives reinscribe “national identity in the fragility after collective violence,” I conclude this project by “dwelling” in one example of the struggles to create an alternative memory symbolic in the face of enormous hegemonic power – the Pointe-au-Chien’s and BCCM’s quest for gaining federal recognition. Gomez-Barris defines “dwelling” as “a literal ‘living with’ and inhabitation of bodies, psyches, and paces; and as a lingering presence, one that persists, insists, resists, and exceeds the containment of these bodies and of the

⁴⁷⁶ Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 5–6.

nation's boundaries."⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, analyzing "how memories dwell in specific cultural location...centers historical knowledge as a force for present efforts toward social change."⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, by dwelling in and with the struggles of the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM to save their land, rebuild their community, and gain federal recognition, this project hopes to demonstrate how historical knowledge also has the potential for serving "as a force for present efforts toward social change."

Proving Existence: The Pointe-au-Chien's and BCCM's Case for Federal Recognition

As the following analysis demonstrates, the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM must work within the established colonial norms of evidentiary proof and knowledge production to prove their very existence. However, within this battle they are not only working to get much needed resources to rebuild their communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, but they are also working to insert themselves into a version of history that has worked to violently erase them for the last 500 years. As such, the stakes of their struggle reveal the immense power of archives to legitimate both the colonial power and nation-state (here collapsed into one), thereby demonstrating another way in which the field of political science should enter into the analysis of archival production as fundamental questions of state power and citizenship frame their struggle. As this discussion demonstrates, the Pointe-au-

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 28–9.

Chien's and BCCM's struggle for federal recognition is far from over as this process will likely take decades. Therefore, in this same vein this conclusion should be read as an opening up of further research,⁴⁷⁹ rather than an ending, pointing to other important lines of inquiry that political science must take up if it desires, as Frymer et.al. urge, "to bring race back into a study of politics" and "return to the study of power, particularly its role in the maintenance of ascriptive hierarchies."⁴⁸⁰

This dissertation, then, concludes in what some may consider an unlikely place for an analysis of archives – the bayous of coastal Louisiana, specifically on Isle de Jean Charles Island, 75 miles southeast of New Orleans home to the BCCM Indian tribe, which is where I first began to understand the real power of archives when I began my dissertation research in 2008. As the preceding analysis discussed, the Pointe-au-Chien and the BCCM were never mentioned in any of the disaster archives, physical or digital, relating to Hurricane Katrina. The devastated land of the Gulf Coast was never discussed as tribal land or sacred ground in any of the many

⁴⁷⁹ In my next research project, I plan to do just this by centering the Pointe-au-Chien's and BCCM's case for federal recognition. In order to both advance the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM's case for federal recognition and to investigate the powerful role of archives in this process, my next project seeks to answer a number of important questions relating to the politics of archives, such as, what is the state's role in determining what constitutes historical evidence? How are private archives connected to state power? Who is given unfettered access to important archives and how? How do archival materials determine tribal sovereignty? How are race and gender figured in these archives? I will answer these questions by analyzing the archival material already being used by the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM, together with conducting research at a number of private archives that the tribes have found difficult to access. My goal in this research is to simultaneously advance the tribes' cases for recognition by locating and analyzing important documents that relate to their history, and also track the movement of these documents from their creation to their current resting place. As I did in my dissertation, I will conduct interviews with archivists and investigate acquisition files in order to trace the path of the materials. Tracking the movement of these materials will shed light on the power involved in amassing archival collections, where only certain archives are given the right to own and control access to knowledge about the past. Moreover, it will shed light on the power relations involved in the state's authority to determine historical evidence, tribal recognition, and sovereignty.

⁴⁸⁰ Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren, "New Orleans Is Not the Exception," 40.

mainstream media reports chronicling the events relating to Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, the federal government never addressed the dire situation of the Native communities as their land is quite literally disappearing by salt water intrusion and the storm surges caused by hurricanes. In fact, the federal government refuses to “recognize” their very existence. Despite this continued process of (neo)colonialization, the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM continue to struggle, rebuild, and survive as they have since white settlers first “discovered” their land.

Isle de Jean Charles Island is quickly dwindling in size, in fact the island has shrunk from four miles in diameter to a mere one-quarter mile in last 50 years, a loss of over 93 percent. This loss of land is acutely painful as this is the sacred land of BCCM. Now in order for tribal members to visit their island, they must carefully watch the tide charts, making sure to pass along the road that connects the island to the mainland only at low tide. As Chief Naquin and I drive along the road on a hot July afternoon, I immediately notice how the double yellow lines now abruptly end as half the road has also been eaten by the sea. This road in many ways perfectly symbolizes the relationship between the BCCM and the government, Chief Naquin explains to me.

The island road was finally built in the 1953. In proper colonial fashion, the government rejoiced that the tribe would now have easy “access” to mainland, making their “integration” seamless. I highlight the words access and integration, because tribal members were systematically denied access to public education until

the mid 1970s,⁴⁸¹ because their tribal membership rendered them illegible in the American racial caste system. Tribal members were not classified as white or Black, which effectively excluded them completely from the segregated Louisiana school system. Therefore, the access that this road afforded was severely limited on multiple levels. As the engineers unveiled their plans for the road, the tribal members explained that the proposed (and current) placement of the road did not make sense as the road would run perpendicular, instead of parallel, to the waves. Therefore, when the summer storms came in, the increased power of the waves would slowly erode the underside of the road eventually causing it to fall apart. The engineers assured the tribe that this would not happen, and they were not willing to consider alternative locations as the distance between the island and the mainland was greater if the road were to run parallel to the waves. Therefore, when the road quickly eroded none of the tribal members were surprised. The engineers returned to better shore up the road, and tribal members insisted that the same thing would happen again. The engineers again ignored the arguments of the tribal members, insisting that a higher road enforced by boulders would solve the problem. I looked out at the results of that brilliant decision as Chief Naquin deftly navigated around the remnants of the road that appeared as if the waves had quite literally taken bites out of the pavement.

As we continued along the road, I was shocked to see such devastation. Some houses were seemingly ripped to shreds with wood scattered across the land, other houses were literally turned upside down as the tip of the roofs were driven into the

⁴⁸¹ Ng-A-Fook, *An Indigenous Curriculum of Place*.

soil, and still other homes were gone – vanished, together with most of the land of the island. The extent of this destruction surprised me because it was 2008, almost three years after Katrina came ashore. Chief Naquin explained that devastation that I now looked at was not only a result of Katrina, but also Rita and then Gustav. Because of this incredible onslaught of storms, most tribal members had moved inland, scattered across a number of parishes; they were too tired, scared, and underfunded to continue the rebuilding effort. This dislocation of tribal members has had its own disastrous effect on the continued history and culture of the tribe. According to Chief Naquin, while it did seem that frequency of the storms had increased, it was the lack of natural or man-made buffers that intensified storms destructiveness, resulting in the havoc that I now saw before my eyes.

Over the years, the BCCM had organized and petitioned both the state and federal government to build levees or to help rebuild the wetlands that the oil and gas companies were destroying in their quest to extract more natural resources. The oil and gas companies dig large canals in the marshland in order to create bigger pathways to move their equipment around. Once they have extracted all that they can in a particular area, they move on to create more canals, never filling in the land they had just removed, thereby exponentially speeding up the process of erosion. The government ignored the pleas of the BCCM, leaving them with little recourse to amend the situation. Moreover, the erosion of marshland drastically changed the ecosystem of the sea, because salt water now intruded into areas where it did not belong. The result of this environmental change severely damaged the shellfish

populations in the area, which were the main source of income for the tribe. In order to try to gain additional resources to combat the loss of livelihood and land, the BCCM joined forces with a neighboring tribal community, the Pointe-au-Chien, in 2006 to petition the federal government for recognition as an Indian tribe, a status that they were denied in 2008, but are currently appealing, which could take decades. It is in the BCCM's struggle to save their land and gain federal recognition that one can see the power of archival theory at full force.

A Native American tribe must gain "recognition" by the federal government in order to gain sovereignty as a tribe. McCulloch and Wilkin explain, the "federal government's acknowledgment is a formal act that establishes a political relationship between a tribe and the United States. Federal acknowledgment affirms a tribe's sovereign status. Simultaneously, it outlines the federal government's responsibilities to the tribe."⁴⁸² This process of gaining federal recognition is extremely complicated, requiring both utmost faith in the power of archives and amply resources to be able to access and navigate them. Because archives are assumed to be neutral storehouses of authentic and original documents, which are open to public scrutiny, their direct role in constituting and controlling the information of the past has been hidden in the margins of their strict procedures, as chapter two discussed. For the BCCM, the effects of these procedures and their inherent assumptions have serious consequences. Tribal members are expected to simply gather evidence of their past in accordance with federal guidelines for the recognition process. Because ideas of history and

⁴⁸² McCulloch and Wilkins, "'Constructing' Nations Within States," 363.

evidence have been so completely naturalized, the immense power in these concepts vanishes into a pretence of objective principles of judgment. However, what gets counted as evidence and how such evidence is stored is a continuation of the state's colonial project of eradicating Native subjects.

The "Procedures for Establishing that an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe" (Part 83 of Title 25 of the "Code of Federal Regulations") under the Department of Interior's Bureau for Indian Affairs stipulates that a petitioning tribe must submit sufficient evidence that meets seven (rather ambiguous) criteria:⁴⁸³

(a) The petitioner has been identified as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900. (b) A predominant portion of the petitioning group comprises a distinct community and has existed as a community from historical times until the present. (c) The petitioner has maintained political influence or authority over its members as an autonomous entity from historical times until the present. (d) It submits to the BAR a copy of the group's present governing document including its membership criteria. (e) The petitioner's membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe or from historical Indian tribes which combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity. (f) The membership of the petitioning group is composed principally of persons who are not members of any acknowledged North American Indian tribe. *(It can meet the criteria if: (1) the petitioner can establish that it has functioned throughout history until the present as a separately autonomous tribal entity; (2) that its members do not maintain a bilateral political relationship with the acknowledged tribe; and (3) that its members have provided written confirmation of their membership in the petitioning group).* (g) Neither the petitioner nor its members are the subject of congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the federal relationship.⁴⁸⁴

In order to satisfy a number of these criteria, petitioning tribes must rely on distant historical "evidence" created by individuals outside the tribe.

⁴⁸³ Skibine, *Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence for Amended Proposed Finding Against Federal Acknowledgement of Hte Point-au-Chien Indian Tribe*.

⁴⁸⁴ Hughes, "Primer on Federal Recognition." [emphasis mine]

According to the government, legitimate evidence largely hinges on outside accounts and interactions with the tribal communities. For example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) lists the following acceptable forms of evidence to meet the first criteria of being identified as an Indian entity since 1900: (1) Identification as an Indian entity by Federal authorities; (2) Relationships with State governments based on identification of the group as Indian; (3) Dealings with a county, parish, or other local government in a relationship based on the group's Indian identity; (4) Identification as an Indian entity by anthropologists, historians, and/or other scholars; (5) Identification as an Indian entity in newspapers and books; (6) Identification as an Indian entity in relationships with Indian tribes or with national, regional, or state Indian organizations.⁴⁸⁵ These “legitimate” forms of evidence require the BCCM to find information on recognition of the tribe by outsiders, information that was based in a racist, colonial system that often failed to distinguish different tribes and practices.⁴⁸⁶ Moreover, this system reemphasizes the power of the colonial gaze, in which tribes must prove their existence by demonstrating that some extension of the colonizer acknowledged their presence. Such evidence is even more difficult to acquire when tribes work to fulfill the second criterion, which involves proving their

⁴⁸⁵ Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Procedures for Establishing That an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe*.

⁴⁸⁶ The BIA does not usually allow oral histories or evidence. Moreover, according to the Pointe-au-Chien's tribal lawyer, while theoretically tribes can provide written records of their own keeping, they still must prove the authenticity of those records. Moreover, for a flood ravaged area such as the coastal bayous of Louisiana, preserving written documents has been an impossibility. Therefore, archival records are privileged. Additionally, BIA staff often advise tribes to concentrate their efforts on gathering archival records, because it is extremely difficult to get other documents approved as legitimate by the BIA.

tribe existed as a distinct community “from historical times until the present.”⁴⁸⁷ To fulfill this requirement, tribes must sift through vast amounts of archived bureaucratic information that may mention their tribe or tribal leaders – a nearly impossible feat as the U.S. colonial project involved creating a legal system that stole the land of the indigenous people by intentionally negating them as legal subjects. This “evidence” must be located, accessed, and gathered in a number of archives scattered throughout the United States and Europe. This is a difficult task for any well-funded, extensively trained researcher, let alone a tribal member who is struggling to rebuild from multiple hurricanes. These extensive and complicated requirements for recognition often create insurmountable barriers for tribal communities, thus continuing the United State’s project of colonialism, once again under the guise of objective law.⁴⁸⁸

Despite this extreme imbalance of power, the BCCM is nonetheless expected to produce such evidence, where they are encouraged to consult the vast amount of information available in the archives, thereby encountering yet another bastion of colonial power. As previously mentioned, archives are fastidiously organized according to specific procedures of categorization, which vary depending upon the institution. This system of categorization represents a key site of subject production. For example, in efforts to help the BCCM and Pointe-au-Chien in their case for recognition, I conducted research at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California.

⁴⁸⁷ Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Procedures for Establishing That an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe*.

⁴⁸⁸ Many critical race legal scholars have revealed the fiction of “objective law” by demonstrating that the law actually creates reality. For example, a general overview of this argument see Mangabeira Unger, 1983.

My limited research at this archive revealed a number of powerful practices in place which structure access to knowledge, and thereby subject formation.

The mere location of this vital information in California, as opposed to Louisiana highlights the way in which archives are used to disperse information. Just as Milligan documented the way in which the French National Archives used museum exhibits to effectively limit access to materials by the public that could be used for ends that worked against state projects, the privatization and professionalization of archives now effectively perform this same feat. “Historically worthy” material is now often bought and sold among private archives, dispersing collections among all corners of the country, if not the world. Therefore, it is often extremely difficult to locate where different information is stored (a process that is being addressed by some progressive digitization projects). It is often only the individual archivists who know the whereabouts and actual content of the significant material – another example of the power of the *archons* as Derrida explained.

Together with the wide dispersal of documents, access to the documents held in individual archives is often extremely difficult to obtain. Blouin and Rosenberg address this crucial issue of access. They explain, “restrictions on access to archival materials, either through systems of classification or requirements that users be credentialed in certain ways, have always been properly understood in terms of politics: as an undesirable, yet inevitable, effect of power.”⁴⁸⁹ This “undesirable, yet inevitable, effect of power” was almost unbelievable in the elaborate measures the

⁴⁸⁹ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, 86.

Huntington Library enacted to control access to its holdings. In fact, I was asked to conduct research at the Huntington, because tribal members had previously had difficulty gaining access, and they surmised, quite correctly, that it would be far easier for me to gain access because I possessed the privilege of university affiliation as a Ph.D. student.

The Huntington Library stipulates separate application forms and procedures for faculty members, doctoral students, and independent scholars. Such categorization of potential applicants “wishing to apply for reading privileges at The Huntington” already creates a hierarchy of access by creating different levels of expertise and definitions of who constitutes a “legitimate” researcher.⁴⁹⁰ Faculty members must prove that they “occupy a full-time faculty position at a college or university” and “hold a doctoral degree (PhD) in the area of proposed research,” and complete a “faculty registration form.”⁴⁹¹ As a doctoral student – the second level in this hierarchy of access, I had to complete an access application that detailed the reasons I would use the archival material. Moreover, I had to prove that I was advanced to candidacy, because the Huntington is quite clear that they grant “reading privileges only to students who have been admitted to PhD candidacy and are engaged in dissertation research.”⁴⁹² Therefore, I had to provide credentials from my University and a letter of verification and support from my Dissertation Advisor proving that I had advanced to candidacy, and was actively conducting research for

⁴⁹⁰ <http://www.huntington.org/huntingtonlibrary.aspx?id=586>. Accessed 2/14/12.

⁴⁹¹ <http://www.huntington.org/huntingtonlibrary.aspx?id=1186>. Accessed 2/4/12.

⁴⁹² <http://www.huntington.org/huntingtonlibrary.aspx?id=1194>. Accessed 2/14/12.

my dissertation. This application then had to be approved by archival staff at least two weeks in advance of the date I wished to access the material. Independent scholars must fill out an application for “Reader Privileges,” which documents their previous research, published works, other archives consulted. Additionally, they must attach two “letters of reference from scholars in good standing who are familiar with your research and can attest to your need for access to the Huntington’s collections.”⁴⁹³ From these three categories of legitimate subjects who can gain access to the Huntington, it is easy to see how tribal members could not gain access as their research and their standing as tribal members was not even legible in this system, thereby evidencing how archives create and recognize subjects from their very procedures of access.

Before entering the reading room of the archive, I had to again have my identity verified and then I was issued a Huntington Library identification badge that I was required to wear at all times. I was also informed that surveillance cameras would watch me from various angles once I was actually in the reading room. This difficult process of access, together with panoptic style of surveillance had a strong impact on me. As I sat reviewing the archival documents, it seemed as I could almost literally feel the power of the archives all around me.

My main task at the Huntington Library was to research the Vaudreuil Papers. In earlier research, tribal members had seen reference to these papers as perhaps containing information relating to their ancestors. The Huntington Library’s archival

⁴⁹³ <http://www.huntington.org/uploadedFiles/Files/PDFs/independentregistration.pdf>. Accessed 2/14/12.

catalogue describes the Vaudreuil papers as follows: “a calendar and index of the personal and private records of Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Royal Governor of the French province of Louisiana, 1743-1753; by Bill Barron.”⁴⁹⁴ From this description, it would be hard to understand that these papers would contain key information for BCCM and Pointe-au-Chien’s case for recognition. Despite the powerful exclusionary role played by these systems of categorization, the BCCM and Pointe-au-Chien are still forced to comply with the false logics of the archive if they want to make a case for federal recognition. Therefore, the BCCM needed to investigate these materials for a reference to the location and community of tribal ancestors. To make matters even more difficult, these papers are written in French in typical cursive handwriting at the time. Therefore, the papers are very difficult to read even if one had a mastery of 18th Century French language. Nonetheless, I muddled through these holdings, taking notes and making photocopies of anything that I thought would be important. In the end, I felt quite useless in my research pursuits. Even as a “trained” researcher afforded considerable privileges, I felt worthless against so many mechanisms of power designed to erase Indigenous history and existence.

The research that I conducted at the Huntington Library only represented one small fraction of all the research the tribe is forced to conduct to comply with regulations involved in “proving” its existence. Despite all their efforts, the initial finding of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was that the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM did

⁴⁹⁴<http://catalog.huntington.org/search~S0?/dVaudreuil%2CPierre+de+Rigaud%2C+marquis+de%2C+1698177/dvaudreuil+pierre+de+rigaud+marquis+de+1698+1778/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CB/frameset&FF=dvaudreuil+pierre+de+rigaud+marquis+de+1698+1778+manuscripts+index&1%2C1%2C>. Accessed 12/7/11.

not meet three of the seven criteria for proving that “an American Indian group exists as an Indian Tribe.”⁴⁹⁵ Specifically, the findings report concludes that the tribes lacked sufficient evidence to prove that: (1) “its ancestors and others associated with them constituted a community before 1830;” (2) “it maintained political influence over its historical ancestors before 1830,” and (3) its members descended “from a historical Indian tribe.”⁴⁹⁶ Even a cursory look at these findings demonstrates the extreme ambiguity of the criteria, and the enormous power to both define the terms and evaluate what constitutes satisfactory evidence. The tribe, however, is allowed to appeal the findings by introducing further evidence addressing the criteria that they failed to meet. Therefore, the tribe must go back to the archives and continue their search for “sufficient evidence” to prove their “existence,” a task which they continue to do to this day.

This brief exploration into the Pointe-au-Chien’s and BCCM’s case for federal recognition demonstrates the real power that archives have to select, organize, and allow access to material from the past. Moreover, it sheds light on how the state relies on archives as tools to enforce its strict boundaries of full inclusion into the state, with complete rights and privileges, determining who has the right to belong. Despite facing what seems like almost insurmountable bastions of power, the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM continue their struggle for federal recognition because of the crucial access to much needed resources it promises. Additionally, they continue to

⁴⁹⁵ Skibine, *Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence for Amended Proposed Finding Against Federal Acknowledgement of Hte Point-au-Chien Indian Tribe*, 1.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

survive, to maintain their community relations, and to hold onto their land despite the incredible violence of the state, both physical and epistemic, bent on their final destruction. While Gomez-Barris centered more traditional cultural productions, such as memorials and public ceremonies, in her study of memory symbolic, I argue that we must also see such real political struggles waged in the space of the archives, as another important memory symbolic, here fought in the heart of hegemonic institutions of historical production. Moreover, analyzing the real power structures involved archival production and interpretation, together with their specific incarnations in the criteria that the Pointe-au-Chien and BCCM must prove to gain federal recognition, works to denaturalize the power of the archive as objective and neutral. Such archival work is necessary to produce ruptures in the archive's power "to impose the law". Therefore, it has been the hope of this dissertation to reveal the power of archives to produce notions of national belonging in the newly created disaster archives, both from the material that is collected and from the other material and struggles that are left out.

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