Documenting Ferguson:
Perspectives after Seven Years

Rudolph Clay
Head of Library Diversity
Initiatives & Outreach
African & African
American Studies Subject
Librarian

Miranda Rectenwald
Curator of Local History
Julian Edison Department
of Special Collections
Documenting Ferguson:
Perspectives after Seven Years

1. Origin & Goals
2. About Ferguson, MO
3. Implementation & first few years
4. Technology
5. Contributors
6. Results
7. Lessons learned
8. Looking ahead
1. Origin of the Documenting Ferguson Archive

- Eighteen year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson, August 9, 2014 in Ferguson Missouri

- Washington University Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton called the university to action

- The director of the Washington University Libraries tasked a library committee to establish a web site and begin to solicit images, videos, and personal stories from the events following the shooting of Michael Brown

Project Goals

- **Collect the events** captured on cell phones, Twitter, blogs, and other social media before they became inaccessible.

- Make the collection easily **accessible to the public**.

- Collect diverse perspectives that will **encourage and support future research and scholarship** of what happened in Ferguson and why.
Distance between Ferguson and Washington University: 6.6 miles
Ferguson, Missouri in 2014

Total Area: 6.20 square miles

Demographics ¹
- Population (2010 Census) 21,000
- Racial Makeup (2010 Census)
  - 67.4% African Americans
  - 29.3% White
- Racial composition of the Ferguson Police (August 2014)
  - 50 Whites and 3 African-Americans

Income
- 25% of African Americans lived below the poverty line
- 11% of whites lived below the poverty line
- Median income for African Americans: $32,500
  - Unemployment: 19.0%
- Median income for whites: $53,400 for whites.
  - Unemployment 6.7%

². https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City_Hall,_Ferguson,_Missouri.jpg
³. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Canfield.jpg Jonathunder, permission to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License.
3. Implementation

- committee
- rapid
- partnership development
- early assessment
“The death of local teenager Michael Brown, Jr. and the social protests it sparked have forever changed our region. As institutions representing various aspects of the community—education, culture, and civic societies—we believe that the work of capturing and preserving this historic moment is a responsibility we all share and falls within the missions of our respective organizations. As this movement continues to unfold, we are compelled to work together to collect content (images, artifacts, stories, oral histories, documents) that centers the local perspective within the narrative…”

Signed by:
Ferguson Municipal Public Library, Scott Bonner, Director
Harris-Stowe State University, Barbara Noble, Director of Library Services
Missouri History Museum, Christopher Gordon, Director, Library & Collections
Missouri Humanities Council, Dr. William S. Belko, Executive Director
Saint Louis University, David Cassens, Dean of Libraries
University of Missouri–St. Louis, Christopher Dames, Dean of Libraries
University of Missouri–St. Louis, Dr. Kathleen Nigro, Department of Sociology, Gerontology, and Gender Studies
Washington University Libraries, Chris Freeland, Associate University Librarian
Though the archive had received national attention fewer items had been contributed in 2015 by the public than originally expected. Chris Freeland and Kodjo Atiso investigated two research questions in 2015:

1. Are there social barriers that are dissuading people from participating in the Documenting Ferguson archive?
2. Are there technical barriers in the Documenting Ferguson archive that are preventing an online community from forming?

Their usability study suggested that:

- The purpose of the site and its intended audience was unclear
- The searching features of the website should be further developed
- Technical barriers were preventing users from contributing content to the website (i.e., difficulty uploading content)

These findings were welcomed by website developers and new methods of outreach, marketing, uploading, and searching were developed.

Identified Challenge - Lack of Diverse Perspectives

- Voices of the residents of Ferguson Missouri
- Supporters of Officer Darren Wilson / police and other law enforcement officers that were involved in the protests

Other Archives that can supplement the Documenting Ferguson Archive

- The Washington University Libraries received a grant from the university’s Divided Cities Urban Humanities Initiative to collect Oral Histories in Ferguson (2015)
Acknowledgement

colleagues

as a white archivist

“… a responsibility to combat racist practices in our profession…”

~ Archives for Black Lives, June 2, 2020

4. Technology: Omeka ‘classic’

- installed on separate server
- contribution plug-in
- +dropbox batch upload
- submissions reviewed
Documenting Ferguson is a freely available resource that seeks to preserve and make accessible the digital media captured and created by community members following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. Our project has the ultimate goal of providing diverse perspectives on the events in Ferguson and the resulting social dialogue. Contribute your voice to the discussion by adding your images, videos or personal stories to the collection.

Note: Video content is best viewed in Firefox or you may need to download a plug-in.
5. Content contributors

- Community members
- Archive-It / Internet Archive
Contributors: agreement and rights

Terms & Conditions

- copyright retained
- worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license

Third-party Use

Approval Criteria

1. Content is related to the events surrounding the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO on August 9, 2014.
2. File size of contributed content does not exceed 30 MB.
3. Metadata submitted is deemed to be accurate by the administrator.
4. Users have the right to submit content and submission does not infringe any existing copyright.
5. Content does not provide personal information of the contributor or any other individual, including addresses, phone numbers, etc.
6. Content does not endorse any commercial product.
7. Content does not pose a risk of damage to the network, computers, or servers of Washington University.
Documenting Ferguson is a freely available resource that seeks to preserve and make accessible the digital media captured and created by community members following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. Our project has the ultimate goal of providing diverse perspectives on the events in Ferguson and the resulting social dialogue. Contribute your voice to the discussion by adding your images, videos or personal stories to the collection.

Note: Video content is best viewed in Firefox or you may need to download a plug-in.

Share your photos. Share your story.

Add images/audio/video/stories to the collection

Contribute: Documenting Ferguson Collection

Have a lot of content? Send files via Dropbox to digital@wumail.wustl.edu with a text file containing filenames, titles, dates, and any other identifying information.

Title through description fields are visible to the public. No required fields.

What are you contributing? Select Below

Contact Us Terms & Approval Criteria Privacy Use Conditions © 2015 Washington University in St. Louis

Pursue what’s possible.
Contribute: Documenting Ferguson Collection

Have a lot of content? Send files via dropbox to digital@wumail.wustl.edu with a text file containing filenames, titles, dates, and any other identifying information.

Title through description fields are visible to the public. No required fields.

What are you contributing? [Image]

Upload a file
Browse... No file selected.

Title

Creator (LEAVE BLANK TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS)

Creator Email (LEAVE BLANK TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS)

Date

Description
5. Content contributors / partners

- Contributors: agreement and rights

- Archive-It / Internet Archive
#blacklivesmatter Web Archive

**Collected by:** Internet Archive Global Events  
**Archived since:** Aug, 2014

**Description:** In August of 2014, the Archive-It team put out a call for URLs related to the August 9th shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. Soon after we were joined by Archive-It partner Washington University in St. Louis, MO who contributed lists of URLs and solicited URLs from communities in and around Ferguson. Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities contributed a significant number of URLs extracted from tweets about Michael Brown and Ferguson. In December we expanded the collection to include content related to the July 17th chokehold death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, and the reactions around the country to the acquittal of the police officers in both cases. The collection then progressed further to reflect the movement building in reaction to police violence against people of color. Today the #blacklivesmatter Web Archive contains news articles, blogs, social media, and other websites related to Ferguson, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, protests and demonstrations around the country, and seeks to document the movement as it grows and evolves. Note: Many of these sites contain videos, some of which may not play back in the page. To view archived videos click on the Videos link in the yellow banner at the top of the archived web page.
6. Results

- 700+ files online
- #blacklivesmatter web archive
- DPLA
- classes, exhibits...
- Inspired more projects
7. (So, so, many) **lessons learned**

- Social Justice & digital archiving
- Staffing changes / continuity
- Need for MoU
- Digital migration plans
8. Looking ahead

◊ **History Happening Now: St. Louis 2020**
https://library.wustl.edu/history-happening-now-st-louis-2020

◊ OmekaS improvements

◊ Digital repository changes
Final thoughts

From Archivists for Black Lives:

- Ethics
- Guides and resources
- Privacy and safety of protesters
- Secondary trauma
- It is ok to not collect

(Links and readings shared in pdf)

Questions?

Miranda Rectenwald
mrectenwald@wustl.edu

Rudolph Clay
rudolphc @wustl.edu
Description for notes
• describe an issue of concern and how the choice of technology helped address it.
• managing that technology or platform, including any surprises or lessons learned along the way.
• Participants will gain an awareness of local, regional, or national issues that librarians are working to address, as well as engage with ideas and best practices for technological solutions.

By the end of this webinar, the participant will be able to:
• Explain how libraries can use emerging technology to create a more just society
• Describe elements for incorporating social justice into their library's online presence
• Examine ways of documenting, presenting, and interacting with technologies that support and value equity, diversity and inclusive practices