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Civic Literacy in a Diverse Southern California Community: Sustaining Local Political Knowledge

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Abstract:

In the United States of America the right to vote and the use of the vote are seen as pillars of responsible citizenship and a healthy democracy. Democracy is defined as "the common people, especially as the primary source of political power; includes social equality and respect for the individual within a community" (Webster's dictionary). Open access to political knowledge and preservation of this information helps citizens understand a broad range of past and current community issues that impact their lives. "A robust democracy and public welfare depend on an engaged and informed citizenry…"(Kranich 2005). Furthermore, Kranich states that, "ultimately,

discourse among informed citizens assures civil society and civil society provides the social capital necessary to achieve sovereignty of the people, by the people and for the people" (Kranich 2005).

Keywords: civic literacy, multicultural, communities, web archiving, California

Introduction:

In 2010, librarians at the University of California in Santa Barbara (UCSB) started a project to focus on a crucial but somewhat allusive literature – that of electoral campaigns geared toward the local multicultural communities. From our research, we found that California was only mandated to collect ballot measures, campaign finance information, candidate data, and election results.

We determined that, in many instances, websites, election flyers, social networks, digital media and printed campaign materials collected and preserved by libraries and repositories were limited in scope. Also, many of the local candidates' websites from the most recent election were no longer available past the campaign.
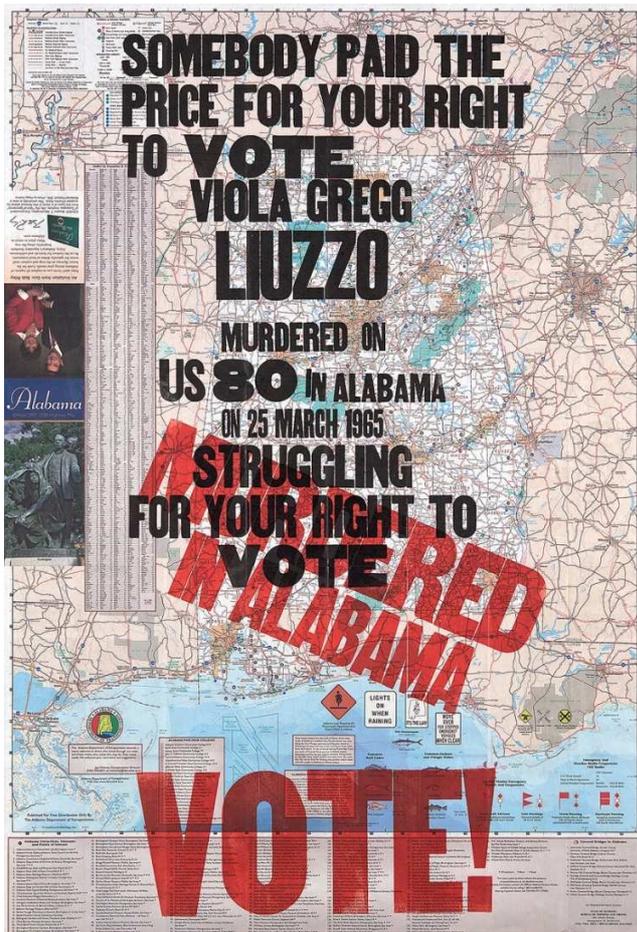
The paper will highlight some of the various archiving tools and services that would serve as models for sustaining and making accessible local political history for citizens. In addition, this archive would provide information on the ways candidates and citizens articulate social, economic and other community issues. It will assist diverse communities to view how their representative/government officials have articulated issues. Archiving will serve as a foundation to understand persistent issues, formulate informed current and future strategies, solutions and develop coalition-building efforts within our diverse community.

This presentation is a continuation of a poster session exhibited during the IFLA 2010 conference. The poster was entitled, *Local Elections, Campaign Literature and diverse Communities: Access Issues & Sustainable Solutions.*

Historical Background

When the Constitution, supreme law, of the United States was adopted in 1787, the right to vote and participate in the governmental process was limited to a select group of people. Although the preamble states in part, "we the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote general welfare…" (U.S. Constitution, Preamble), the protection of those rights was not a guarantee for many citizens.

For several years women, people of color and other underrepresented populations and communities have been flagrantly disenfranchised from exercising their "democratic and civic rights". Many Americans have fought for the rights denied them, and in doing so, sacrificed their lives.

Somebody Paid for Your Right to Vote-2008
by Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr., printer, artist, activist

This print is an official map of the State of Alabama in America, where acts of violence occurred during the African American Civil Rights Movement's campaign to register Blacks to vote (1955-1968). Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights activist, was helping with this registering effort when she was shot and killed by members of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK), an extremist, racist, supremacy group in America.

"This welcoming tourist map, overlaid with text resembling an official stamp, poses a tragic contradiction and urges the exercise of the hard-won right to vote" (CEMA 2012).

Over the past 200 years amendments to the United States Constitution and governmental legislations have been enacted and ratified to ensure extension of voting rights to disenfranchised communities. The 15th amendment of 1870, gave citizens the right to vote. It stated that the right "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude"(U.S. Const. amend. XV). In 1920, women were given the right to vote under the 19th amendment (U.S. Const. amend. XIX). This amendment was ratified to reaffirm the right to vote. But contrary to the purpose of these amendments, reaping the benefits of democracy was an ongoing struggle.

For example, several states ignored the purpose of the amendments to allow all citizens the right to participate in the civic process. These states required the payment of poll taxes in order to vote. In addition, literacy tests were imposed on certain groups. As a result, these barriers impacted their ability to participate as voting citizens in the political process (Williams 1992, 97).

Thus, the struggle for inclusion in the United States democratic system emerged in the form of social and political movements by various groups and individuals. One such outgrowth from these mass protests was the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its purpose was to restore and secure "political citizenship" and to provide stronger protection for disenfranchised citizens (Williams 1992, 98). However, despite the passage of amendments and legislations, there have been ongoing obstacles that have tended to discourage engaging in the civic process even today.

In the article, *Ensuring Access to the Ballot Box: Voting Rights in the United States*, it was stated that voter identifications requiring driving licenses unduly burden the elderly, minorities, the poor, and the homeless because not everyone has government issued identification. In addition, in "several states there have been efforts to establish or enforce English Only Laws." For some naturalized citizens who have only basic english skills, their participation in the civic process would be limited (Yang 2008, 223).

In recent years the population in the United States has become an increasingly multicultural and diverse society (Population Profile of the United States- United States Census 2012). Inclusion in the democratic process is crucial for these various communities. Their interests and concerns need to be represented by candidates and politicians. Thus, the control of political information and knowledge is vital to ensure civic literacy.

In Milner, civic literacy is viewed as knowledge and the ability of citizens to make sense of their world to act as competent citizens (Milner 2002,1). This knowledge bridges the gaps for citizens who are not informed about their world and are unable to engage in civic democracy. As Clubb states, " there's no better institution to build community and strengthen civic literacy than the great and small libraries across the county: public libraries, and school media centres..."(Clubb 2006, 4). In our local community this same principle applies for ensuring that access to political knowledge is available for citizens to make informed decisions about their futures.

How can libraries close the political knowledge information gaps?

Listed below are examples of methods we propose to employ to provide access and sustain the political knowledge in our local diverse community.

Traditional Archiving

Archiving can take place in many types of locations; colleges, universities, local respositories, public libraries, museums, local citizen community groups, social organizations, and political groups. Archives collect, maintain, and preserve rare, unique and valuable heritage materials. Organizing and describing materials creates ease of access for users.
The control of the intellectual contents and physical forms is designed to help users study, research, and explore for personal enrichment. If we don't archive these various types of materials, the knowledge disappears.

The Special Collections department at the University of California, acquires all types of materials covering various subject areas. When librarians determined that access to printed campaign and political literature in our local community was limited, we explored the possibilities of acquiring available printed literature: realia, posters, photographs, election flyers, and brochures, videos, audios, and speeches. We also want to acquire audio and video media as it becomes available. Our objective is to outreach to candidates, political organization, community groups and individuals as we seek to acquire ephemera other types of resources.

Department of Special Collections

Welcome

The Department of Special Collections acquires, preserves, and makes accessible rare, valuable, or unique materials which support UCSB students, faculty, and research programs, as well as the scholarly community. The department's holdings are non-circulating but are available for research in the reading room during posted hours.

Special Collections acquires materials by gift, transfer, and purchase, in accordance with general library **procedures**.

Manuscript Stacks

Will traditional archiving suffice for the long term future access by users? How do we provide access to these resources for citizens who want information quickly over the internet. How do we efficiently and effectively use the emerging technology to reach the wider community?

These questions are likely answered with the growing trend of digitization projects that have become a dominant movement toward outreach and access for users. In recent years there has been a strong push to digitized well used resources. Digitization is another tool useful to preserve and control political knowledge for diverse communities.

Digitization

Digitizing collections of materials in all types of formats has become a top priority in many archives, libraries, institutions and repositories. This is a growing trend for the future preservation and sustainability of fragile, unique, and rare items.

The *Online Archive of California* (OAC), since 1994 has provided free public access to detailed descriptions of primary resources maintained by more than 200 contributing institutions in California.

We propose to use this tool as we acquire and process political materials from various entities in our local diverse community. The tool will provide long term access. With a traditional archive, users generally would need to view the materials on-site. However, by digitizing materials online, users will be able to access materials over the internet. Given the concern about the digital divide where some populations will not have the capabilities to retrieve

information online, we acknowledge that in some instances traditional archiving of political materials will be more feasible for some of our community members.

Web Archiving Tools

With the emergence of the internet, there is a need to expand our vision of literacy. Libraries need to "ensure all people in the United States, regardless of age, native language, or income, are able to fully participate in the digital age." Accordingly," digital literacy a keystone for civic engagement, educational success, and economic growth and innovations" (Clark and Visser 2011). Our society has become inundated with all types digital/internet sources of information. These sources include, you tube, twitter, facebook, blogs, websites, etc. The internet has provided abundant avenues for political discourse.

However, according to Dahlen, while more individuals have greater access to information and different perspectives, the ability for some websites to distribute incorrect and misleading information can negatively impact a citizen's opinion of a particular issue (Dahlen 2009). But another dilemma which libraries must address is how to capture this digital technology before it disappears. Citizens cannot make informed decisions about the positions and statements whether (truthful or misleading) of political candidates, if the information is no longer available.

Content from web pages must be maintained over time. In reality, many websites are built, maintained for the period of its use, and then abandoned, or removed entirely off the internet. Web Archiving Tools were designed to archive, preserve and provide access to digital content.

UCLA Online Campaign Literature Archive

In our research for examples of California communities who had collected local election and campaign literature, including ephemera such as campaign flyers, buttons, and bumper stickers, one stellar project came to stand out for their foresight. The UCLA Library's Government Documents section created a campaign literature archive in 1920, selecting federal, state, and local candidate materials and ballot measures that affected Los Angeles citizens. As the internet became a common campaigning method for politicians in the 1990s, staff began to study ways to capture and preserve these campaign websites.

Beginning in 1998, two UCLA Library staff became responsible for capturing and preserving online campaign websites and creating a searchable, browse capable, online archive database. Gabriella Gray and Scott Martin (2007) state: "An analysis of the statistics from the 2006 California general election reveal that, of the 164 candidates falling within the Archives scope, 105 had at least one website. An increasing number of candidates have multiple sites including blogs and My Space pages."

By 2006, Gray and Martin had several years of experience working with various web capture tools, and observing the technical processes, access, copyright and preservation issues that emerged in this work. They presented a paper June 23, 2007, at IWAW '07 in Vancouver, B.C. , outlining their selection process, and comparing the uses of the three web capture software programs they used (WebCopier 4.4, HT Track Website Copier 3.33, and Offline Explorer Pro 4.6).

The 2012 election campaigning has begun, and new web tools have emerged. We cannot say what web capture process UCLA will use as the tools continue to evolve. However, using UCLA as a model, we envision the possibility of using the California Digital Library (CDL) web archiving service (WAS) to build a similar online campaign archive for the Santa Barbara County area, or, collaborating among the University of California system to develop a robust, inclusive and sustainable online campaign archive.

2003 California Recall Election

California Digital Library

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Description

The 2003 California gubernatorial recall election was a special election permitted under California state law. It resulted in voters replacing incumbent Democratic Governor Gray Davis with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger. The recall effort spanned the latter half of 2003. Other California governors, including Pat Brown, Ronald Reagan, Jerry Brown, and Pete Wilson, had faced recall attempts, but these attempts were unsuccessful.

After several legal as well as procedural efforts failed to stop it, Cali...

more ....

Search

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Powered by the Web Archiving Service from the California Digital Library

The Web Archiving Service (WAS) captures website covering many different types of subjects, events, and issues as well as social networks such as you tube, face book and twitter. In California, WAS has been capturing the political information from different statewide election campaigns. The goals for librarians at the university is to begin using this tool to capture our local candidates's websites and social media.

Conclusion

As Jim Rettig states, "elections come and go; but issues abide, as do our roles to promote information literacy and civic literacy" (Rettig 2008). Our goal, as Santa Barbara librarians, is to ensure that citizens in our community understand and have knowledge of past and present local issues expressed by their political representatives. In doing so, citizens will have the knowledge to create current and future coalitions to address their concerns and fully participate in the civic process that impacts their lives.

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