



**Memory, Authenticity and Cultural Identity: The Role of Library Programs, Services and Collections in Creating Community**

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**Abstract:**

*This paper presents a theoretical perspective of documenting diverse cultures and communities, using constructs of cultural memory and authenticity, then illustrates its context with the practices of libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions that serve as mediating structures between and among people and information; more specifically between cultural communities and groups and the records that document their lives. In the case of libraries and other cultural institutions seeking to document diverse cultures and communities, this entails preservation and access not only to books and other textual materials but also to other information and cultural artifacts of life and community.*

In their introduction to *Documenting Cultural Diversity in the Resurgent American South*, Margaret R. Dittmore and Fred J. Hay observed a “widespread interest today in the ways different people recreate the past. The facts from different vantage points can yield very different conclusions, and...different constructions of [the] past”. Dittmore and Hay further argued for “accurate cultural representation, the collection of data, proper access, and the need for preservation” when documenting cultural diversity (Dittmore and Hay, 1997). Their observations provide a framework that identifies, defines, and locates an interaction between *cultural memory* and *authenticity* as they are intertwined with *cultural identity*.

In the paper that follows, a theoretical perspective of documenting diverse cultures and communities (Welburn n.d.) will be placed in context with the practices of libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions that serve as mediating structures (Crane, 2000, p. 147) between people and information, more specifically between cultural communities and groups and the records that document their lives. . Memory as associated with diverse cultures and communities can be validated through institutional actions aimed at what Jan Assmann has referred to as the “concretion of identity or the relation to the group.” (Assmann 1995) In the case of libraries and other cultural institutions seeking to document diverse cultures and communities, this entails preservation and access not only to books and other textual materials but also to other information and cultural artifacts of life and community. This theoretical perspective also broadens the meaning of text proposed by D. F. McKenzie, (McKenzie, 1999) who said, “But what constitutes a text is not the presence of linguistic elements but the act of construction.” A broadened definition of the text implies one that might include other cultural or information artifacts, what Assmann called “figures of memory,” such as stories and ballads, sound recordings of music and spoken word, documentaries and photographs, and other new and emerging media along with texts.

Memory and authenticity are defined here to contextualize their meaning as pivotal to understanding the practice of documenting diverse cultures and communities. Not only has memory been of interest to behavioral scientists, it has captured the imagination of historians, social researchers, and humanists who are constructing memory in relation to history and cultural identity. As Jan Assmann found in his critique of two leading memory exponents – sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and art historian Aby Warburg – their ideas met “in a decisive dismissal of numerous turn-of-the-century attempts to conceive collective memory in biological terms as an inheritable or ‘racial memory.’” (Assmann 1995) By employing it as a cultural framework, memory is an important underlying concept to consider how diverse cultural groups and communities tell their own stories. As Assmann observed, “The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image...The content of such knowledge varies from culture to culture as well as from epoch to epoch.” (Assmann 1995) In other words, collective memory produced by individuals’ association with groups or communities constitutes a form of communication bound by time, and that the association of collective memory with culture and group identification over time produces cultural identity that preserves events so they are handed down from generation to generation, perhaps reconstructed by sharing and communication. As Susan A. Crane wrote, “We cannot assume that there is such a thing as collective memory – whether authentic or inauthentic, directly remembered via participation or indirectly remembered via representation—without the mediation of formal structures of response (discussion, visual images, displays, writing) such as those produced by the collectors. These formal structures of response are the foundations of cultural identity and essential to its existence.” (Crane 2000) Not only does cultural memory differ significantly from history

and historical consciousness, but it also depends heavily on the ability of cultural institutions as mediating structures that collect the texts, sound recordings, photographs, and other figures of memory reflecting the diversity of community and cultural life.

Authenticity also intertwines with cultural identity to shape a theory of documenting diverse cultures and communities. For cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies, validating authority tends to be largely a technical matter. For instance, the report of the Council on Library and Information Resources (Authenticity in a Digital Environment 2000) focuses on the significance of validation processes in association with acquisition, retention, preservation, and access, which is especially difficult in a digital environment. Yet, there is a second dimension to authenticity that has to do with the conundrum raised by Dittmore and Hay concerning “accurate cultural representation.” Sociologists Richard A. Peterson (Peterson 1997) and David Grazian (Grazian 2003) understand authenticity as fabricated over and over again in a way to fit what cultural owners, distributors, and consumers want it to be. In their separate observations on country music and the blues respectively, Peterson and Grazian explored authenticity as a social construction for musicians and music audiences. Authenticity may be subject to shifting taste over generations and time, as in the case of country music, or stereotyping, as in the imagery of an “authentic” blues musician.

The potential for fragmentation and disappearance comes when there is no mediating structure to insure access to information artifacts for future generations. Using Dittmore and Hay’s observations of cultural interaction and Welburn’s theoretical perspective on documenting diverse cultures and communities, a variety of library programs, services, and collections throughout the United States are presented to see how various types of libraries, library associations/consortia, and librarians have interpreted their missions as educational and cultural institutions to collect, preserve, and celebrate the cultural heritage of its many people. Figure 1 is presented to illustrate how the theoretical framework functions to associate libraries and librarians as cultural mediators between collective memories, communities, and their cultural artifacts.

### **Examples of Cultural Reflection and Interpretation**

The following are examples of the ways in which individual library institutions in the United States have embraced the role of cultural mediators to provide culturally relevant collections, services and programs to a broad array of library constituents.

#### ***Archiving the Jazz Experience – the Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies***

Rutgers University is a large, public (state) research university, with three campuses in New Jersey, and more than 50,000 students. The John Cotton Dana Library, on the Rutgers—Newark campus, is home for the renowned Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS), the world’s largest jazz archive. The Institute’s collections include vast holdings of recordings in various formats, books and periodicals, research files and historic photographs, files of clippings, scores, sheet music and its extensive archival collections, instruments and artifacts and tapes and transcriptions collected by the Jazz Oral History Project. Its mission, simply stated, is to both preserve and promote jazz as a living art form.

The Institute’s mission as an archive and as a part of a research university library reflects the role of directly supporting the mission of an urban university and urban university

library. The fulfillment of the Institute's mission has been defined largely by its location in Newark--an urban area with both a rich racial and ethnic history and a uniquely rich jazz history in New Jersey (see Baraka, 1998) by many measures the most racially diverse state in the U.S. and in immediate proximity to New York City. As a city, Newark was a retail and cultural hub for many years, with a vibrant economic and social scene, that was affected dramatically and negatively with the racial unrest and violence of the late 1960's. While the city is beginning a renaissance, a range of urban challenges, including a high rate of poverty and unemployment, the high school dropout rate, and crime have been ongoing. As part of a public university system, the Dana Library and its departments and collections are open to the public at large. And, the responsibility for actively supporting the resolution of the urban issues and the active inclusion of members of the community in university activities and programs has been articulated by university leaders. Begun as a private collection, the Institute was founded in 1952 by jazz scholar Marshall Stearns, with the assistance of a group of other scholars, musicians, critics, collectors, and jazz devotees. The collection became a part of Rutgers University in 1966, and a part of the Rutgers library system twenty years ago. In support of the university mission of research, teaching, and service, the IJS supports a clientele of researchers--scholars and writers, students, musicians, and those in arts institutions, record companies, and the media--doing scholarly and other research in jazz studies and history, social and cultural history, including American Studies and African American Studies, and in particular, civil rights, and popular culture.

The nature of jazz as an art form and an area of scholarly inquiry is important in considering the Institute's support of the urban university mission. Jazz has been described as a "uniquely American art form," closely tied to U.S. history and the cultural landscape. In many ways, jazz is recognized and one of America's primary contributions to world culture. Drawing upon many musical traditions--most importantly, those related to the African American experience--jazz has always transcended geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries and has moved audiences in places, often far removed from its roots. Moreover, jazz has only relatively recently been recognized by the academy and the nation's cultural institutions as an art form equal to more traditionally accepted musical styles.

The Institute's role as a cultural mediator is found in its documentation of the historical record associated with jazz and building a collection of tremendous depth and breadth, providing research support and services, offering programming, and making use of collections in physical and digital exhibits is valuable. However, the public interest in jazz and the depth and breadth of the collection allow the Institute, and thus, the library, to be further integrated into the community, helping to fulfill what is often a difficult component of the university mission--using the focus on research to both document subjects important to the community and to provide information and services to foster understanding and learning. In this case, the enhanced understanding and learning is supported by the fact that jazz, is, in many ways, particularly accessible as an art form, that reflects an important and unique component of America's history and culture.

Ultimately, the ability of the Institute to fulfill its role has been greatly enhanced by its being a part of the University and the Library. In fact, the Institute's holdings have more than quintupled since it became a part of the University. With the steady funding for acquisitions and equipment and location in a state-of-the-art facility in the Dana Library, the Institute provides research assistance and access to its collections for researchers.

In addition, being a unit of the Rutgers University Libraries has enabled IJS to benefit from the expertise and technical and technological support and resources, including

cataloging of materials and serials management, and shared staffing, facilities, and equipment of a major research university library system. Some of the collections are Web-accessible, including several mounted exhibits and transcripts and audio recordings of oral history interviews. Thus, the symbiotic relationship between the Institute and its university library parent organization enhances the ability to benefit a broadly defined user community and to foster fulfillment of the larger university mission.

### ***The University of Michigan: A Library as a Campus Point of Intersection***

An academic library is, in many ways, a point of intersection for its campus community (Downing, 1998; Wheeler, 1988). Where else on campus do medical doctors, student athletes, professors of history, graduate students in physics, laboratory workers, secretaries, deans, and many others, all come together to access historical, cultural, factual, fictional, and other types of resources on just about any topic on earth? Most spaces on campus cater to an exclusive community, be it disciplinary, or function, whereas the Library, creates a welcome intellectual and cultural space for all.

At the University of Michigan Library, librarians have deliberately set aside precious space and resources to create the programs and collections that will draw a broad constituency, and attract the wonderful magic that can only occur when this type of diversity is present. The following recounts just a few examples of this unique cultural role the Library has undertaken for its campus (and the larger) community.

Just over one year ago, the University Library drastically changed its public face with a large redistribution of space in its largest library, the Hatcher Graduate Library, physically located at the absolute center of campus. The Library was built in 1920, and has undergone many additions and repurposing of spaces over the years since then. In 2008, the decision was made to move Library staff out of a spacious area on the first floor of the Library, in order to create a beautiful public space where a variety of cultural and academic exhibits and programs could occur. In a matter of months, the space was transformed from a warren of staff cubicles to a beautiful, open space with large windows allowing for bright natural light, high ceilings lending to the spaciousness of the new library gallery, and a large range of possibilities. Over the course of the last year, a wonderful variety of people have been involved in creating and putting together programs relating to many different aspects of culture including exhibits and programs commemorating the turbulent 1960s, celebrating the campus theme semesters on astronomy (in conjunction with the anniversary of Galileo), the life of a great leader and football coach Bo Shembechler, performances by student musicians, poetry readings, yoga and tai chi classes, and many more.

For example, in January 2009, the library gallery featured a series of events to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior. These events coordinated with campus-wide celebrations, and not only highlighted portions of the library's rich civil rights and cultural community collections, but did so in ways that encouraged interaction between communities on campus and in the Ann Arbor community. Selected examples of these events included showing little-known documentaries from the Library's media collections over lunch hours and in the evenings, a special live viewing of the inauguration of America's first African American President, poetry readings, a Diplomat-in-Residence lecture, a collaborative program with one of Ann Arbor's independent bookstore to highlight the writings of various civil rights authors, and an informative and moving exhibit entitled "The Whole World Was Watching: Revolution and Protest in 1968."

Each of these constellations of programs, exhibits, and performances has commonalities in that they provide a link between many various sub-communities within the larger campus community and the Library's collections in these areas—they provide a way for many different individuals and groups to connect with one another and the Library that had not been possible before this venue was available. The Library is now able to interpret its vast collections for its constituents in ways that were simply not possible before we had a cultural space to do so.

Today, the Library, and its image within the campus community is morphing into a dynamic, fun, interesting, and exciting place where concerts, classes, lectures, exhibits, panels, take place many times a week (sometimes in a single day!). These programs create a synergy on campus, connecting our constituents with our unparalleled cultural collections and librarian expertise.

### ***Digital Collections at Raynor – Memorial Libraries, Marquette University***

“History,” Patrick Hutton argues, “is an art of memory because it mediates the encounter between two moments of memory: repetition and recollection.” Hutton observes an interplay between repetition as an often unreflective “presence of the past” and recollection as the deliberate effort to “evoke the past” in present concerns. This interplay between repetition and recollection may also serve as a way of understanding the efforts of Marquette University's Raynor -- Memorial Libraries to transform historical documents in different media into digital forms. Several examples of digital projects at Marquette University serve to illustrate the University Libraries efforts to document diverse cultures and communities grounded in historical mission, association with the Catholic Church, and geographic location in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States.

According to Martin Irvine, “The social significance of the book is under revision in the digital environment,” and that the page is as “an information system...the page contains an abundance of cultural information beyond the text context.” In the context of digital content creation in Marquette University libraries' Web environment, more is being done than the technical practice of digitization. Substantial attention is being given to the ability of the library to transform information from relative obscurity to a digital environment for enhancing users' understanding of the past and the meaning of past events in present situations.

Marquette University is particularly well suited for a series of digital projects that are associated with movements to document diverse cultures and communities. Critical to the mission of Marquette is “the sharing of knowledge”, and the Libraries' Special Collections has accumulated knowledge that sheds light on important historical moments. Marquette is also situated geographically in a region of the United States that has active and vibrant Indigenous communities and has attracted immigrants from Europe, African Americans during the Great Migration in the U.S., and more recently, populations in the Puerto Rican and Mexican American diasporas. The effort of the Libraries and its Special Collections to work with Catholic and Jesuit communities, local historical societies, and with alumni has resulted in the accumulation of rich textual and visual materials. Three digital environments that serve to document diverse cultural activities and community life are presented.

First, the Libraries hold an extensive collection of the records of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, including over 1,800 images of Native American life and Catholic mission work. Digitized collections include extensive photographic images the Holy Rosary Mission and Red Cloud Indian School and the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations in

South Dakota, as well as extant issues of the *Indian Sentinel*, a “fundraising magazine” published by the Bureau. These collections are especially useful for research and study on the association between the Catholic Church and Native Americans in the United States. Visual images are organized and hyperlinked to aid the user in reconstructing communities. At one level, these images constitute a rich reservoir of 20<sup>th</sup> century life; at another, they provide documentation of a controversial association between indigenous populations, the church, and the government.

The Libraries also worked with the Wisconsin Black Historical Society to present documentation on the Civil Rights movement in Milwaukee and, in particular, the March on Milwaukee of the 1967 and the leadership of Vel Phillips and Reverend James Groppi. In addition to programming to commemorate the activities of 1967-68, the Libraries’ archivist and head of the Department of Special Collections also worked with Marquette students to research and recreate historical events using new media.

Finally, the library has digitized and made Web-accessible several other collections. One digital collection includes numerous visual images (photographs, yearbooks, newspapers) of athlete, U.S. congressman, and Marquette alumnus, Ralph Metcalfe, in his journey from Marquette student athlete to Olympian. Another collection drawn from the personal papers of Wisconsin artist Karl Priebe, features some 700 postcards depicting prominent African Americans taken between 1946 and 1956 by Carl Van Vechten. Portraits from Manhattan: the Portrait Photography of Carl Van Vechten, an online exhibition, celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the NAACP and features portraits of many individuals associated with the civil rights organization, most notably W.E.B. DuBois.

These collections are largely printed and visual; however, the libraries is beginning to work with materials in other media, most notably taken from its audio collections. As it stands, the visual display of information is more than an issue of access to these invaluable resources. Digitization allows for a quality of visualization that is difficult to achieve in book formats. Moreover, these digital projects offer important linkages between materials that cross significant intellectual bridges between content for technological manipulation and use.

### ***University of Arizona Libraries’ Peer Information Counseling Program***

The University of Arizona (UA) is a premier Research I university in the Southwest and a land grant institution. Located in Tucson, Arizona, near the US border with Mexico, the campus and surrounding community are very culturally diverse. The University of Arizona is working to reflect this diverse community, admitting its largest minority freshman class of 1,929 students in its history in 2007, with 26% (9,714 students) of the total student body coming from a multicultural background (UA Fact Book, 2007-2008). While recruitment rates of multicultural students to universities in the United States have risen, persistence rates of multicultural students still prove a challenge both on the national level and at the UA, which graduated 1,735 minority students in the 2006/07 school year. The University of Arizona is dedicated to maintaining a diverse academic community, and working to create a welcoming and supportive environment. The University of Arizona Libraries very much supports this mission with a long history of responsive and responsible collection development, service coordination, and celebration of culturally diverse communities.

One service the UA Libraries provides is the Peer Information Counseling (PIC) program, which is coordinated through the Libraries’ instructional outreach initiative that focuses primarily on multicultural students. The PIC program was originally developed at

the University of Michigan Library and later implemented at the University of Arizona Libraries. The PIC program is a peer mentoring/counseling model intended to improve learning outcomes for minority students. It is based on the premise that peers relate to one another in a manner that helps to overcome affective barriers to learning (Keefer, 1993; Twomey, 1995), and students are more comfortable with one another than with authority figures (Good, Halpin, and Halpin, 2000).

The UA Libraries Peer Information (PI) Counselors are a group of underrepresented minority students who are highly trained to deliver information access service in multiple ways and in different locales across campus. These include the library as well as centers, programs, and classes designed for multicultural students. Their placement is determined through close collaboration with student services and retention programs whose goals are also targeted at multicultural students. The PI Counselors receive in-depth research and reference skills training from librarians and are also provided training in cultural sensitivity and academic success skills such as time management, study proficiencies, and even resume writing. They also learn about specific multicultural resources that are often of interest to the constituencies they serve. These resources include Chicano Hispanic and Native American collections and select primary resources located within the UA Libraries' Special Collections. Their skills are put to good use at the UA Libraries Information Commons Reference Desk where they provide assistance to students, faculty, and staff. More critically, they serve in multiple sites across the campus including the four cultural centers -- Chicano/Hispano, Asian Pacific American, Native American, and African American student centers, the Disability Resource Center, and at the Student Athlete Study Tables.

It is here that their skills and abilities are best utilized; they are the face of the library, promoting the library's services and resources. They identify with their peers, whether through shared language, race and culture, or some other means of identity of sub-culture (student athlete, disability, major, hobby, etc.) Also, as part of the library's outreach initiatives, the outreach librarian, in collaboration with the Multicultural Affairs and Student Services Office, provides information literacy instruction to a number of transitions courses intended to enhance retention of minority students by teaching skills to ensure their academic success. The PI Counselors assist in the development and delivery of this instruction. The American Council on Education states that "Programs and activities to ease their transition, such as summer programs for high school students, orientation programs for all students, peer counselors, and social and cultural opportunities that expose all students to cultural diversity will help minority students feel more comfortable and welcome and contribute to the education of all students" (American Council on Education, 1989).

It is important that the PI Counselors are readily available in these sites, which are intended to improve retention by providing an environment that supports both academic and social interactions while creating a hospitable environment for minority students that celebrates the multicultural experience. The PI Counselors, as library ambassadors, serve as mentors, tutors, and information providers to their peers validating the importance of the multicultural experience and thereby facilitating the relationship between students – all students – and information in all its forms and functions.

## Library Associations/Consortia

In addition to individual libraries, library associations and library consortia also can provide leadership on cultural programming in the library community. The following highlights several such groups that have actively promoted cultural diversity for their memberships.

### *American Library Association*

The American Library Association's (ALA) mission is "to provide leadership for development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all." To that end, ALA has committed to cultural programming that is made available to libraries throughout the United States through the ALA Public Programs Office (PPO). PPO's mission is "to foster cultural programming as an integral part of library service."

PPO working with its key member committee, the Public and Cultural Programs Advisory Committee, and also through its strategic planning process developed a goal to "focus attention on outreach and service expansion to specialized audiences." The specific objectives to achieve this goal include creating initiatives that would appeal to different cultures by coordinating with other ALA offices such as the Diversity Office. PPO also is looking into assessing the ability to provide programs/exhibits in other languages. Although the cultural programming is developed and offered through ALA, its effect has been enormous because there are many small libraries serving communities too far from metropolitan areas to benefit from the cultural programming in those cities. This outreach to those communities begins to equalize the access to cultural programming for many, not those just residing in medium to large cities.

Even though PPO has offered cultural programming services for some time now, it has been working diligently to reach out to libraries that serve a burgeoning minority population in the United States. These types of programs have helped public libraries to reach out to their minority residents to bring them into the libraries and engage them as new users. ALA's PPO has provided programs of a general thematic nature that would be of interest to the multicultural populations in the U.S. as well as specific programs designed for multicultural residents. Examples of the type of cultural programming offered by ALA's Public Programming Office include the following:

Twenty-five (25) public libraries in the United States were selected to host *Pride and Passion: The African American Baseball Experience*, a traveling exhibition telling the story of black baseball players in the U.S. This exhibit was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and came from a permanent exhibition at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

In PPO's very popular, *Let's Talk About It* series, that public libraries in the U.S. are invited to apply for these cultural programming grants. The grants cover program costs such as program materials - introductory literature and essays on each of the themes, selections for additional reading, template promotional materials - and scholar honoraria. The program's library project directors are trained at a national training workshop where they will hear from project scholars, experts, organizers, and receive a program planning guide, materials and ideas for programming. The *Let's Talk About It* series are thematic and include books from

authors of color such as Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, Ana Castillo, and Sandor Marai. Another example is the *Let's Talk About It: Jewish Literature* program, which has been going strong since 2004 and was expanded to include academic libraries. It was been presented by 330 libraries around the U.S. and reached over 30,000 people.

PPO has received funding from IMLS (Institute for Museum and Library Services) to launch a home page ([www.programminglibrarian.org](http://www.programminglibrarian.org)), which is designed as a resource for librarians planning cultural programs. It also includes a blog that highlights special cultural events (e.g. Jazz Appreciation Month in April) for which librarians can find resources.

These are just some examples of what PPO offers to community libraries that would probably not be able to offer such types of cultural programs otherwise.

It is also important to mention that the American Library Association, the oldest and largest library association in the world, has also interpreted its mission as an educational and cultural institution that can assist libraries in the U.S. in celebrating the cultural heritage of its many people. ALA helps to provide public libraries that serve minority communities the chance to not only offer cultural programs with ethnic/racial themes but to also offer them the opportunity to participate in many other cultural programs being offered throughout the U.S. by ALA. It definitely has assumed a role in helping public libraries offer cultural programming for their minority users as well as other users that help them *create community*.

### ***Urban Libraries Council***

It is critical to document the diverse cultures that make up our communities around the world but it is equally crucial to understand the needs of these communities that we serve. Libraries have traditionally, if not entirely consciously, embodied a service model much like the American adage “if we build it they will come.” There has been little consideration of the impact of global migration on communities which has throughout the years shifted from monocultures based on a shared past to rapidly changing communities from across the globe whose inhabitants are no longer bound by geographic space or the past.

To authentically participate in maintaining the collective memory of a cultural tradition, a library must first assess the current community being served, partner with grass roots and established community partners, and conduct community assessments to provide accurate and authentic collections, services, and programs. Libraries must shift from the “us and them” model to become partners in serving culturally diverse groups and providing the educational and social opportunity for these diverse groups to come together and learn about and from one another.

The Urban Libraries Council, an association of North America’s premier public and metropolitan libraries dedicated to strengthening the public library as an essential part of urban life has most recently published the *Welcome, Stranger: Public Libraries Build the Global Village* to strategically provide libraries with a starting point to create awareness of services to attract culturally diverse populations to the library. The strategies for libraries contained within the *Welcome, Stranger* kit include:

- How to better understand local immigrant populations by identifying potential community barriers and library barriers to full participation and engagement by these cultural communities.
- How to perform a community information inventory with public service staff and other community agencies (associations, institutions, and individuals).

- Strategies to identify community information sources besides the library (shared vehicles for cultural communication –ethnic newspapers, grocery stores that carry ethnic foods, cultural centers, etc.)
- Ways to bring cultural and language sensitivity to service delivery on the library’s website, within the library’s marketing materials, in the outreach into the cultural communities, and through the development of strategic partnerships and relationships.
- Ways to build [English] language capacity for various cultural communities, including adult literacy, early literacy, family literacy, and out of school time service to young adults and teens.
- How to create connections to local institutions for workforce and business development. These connections include partnering with a multitude of types of community organizations including: immigrant and refugee agencies, schools (k-12), higher education, health and wellness agencies, social services, legal aid, government agencies, other non-profit and cultural agencies.
- Methods for encouraging and creating opportunities for civic engagement of newer residents and immigrants

Identifying key audiences and needs for services is an important next step. Setting priorities that will be the most beneficial not only for the library but for the community is key to the success of engaging the whole spectrum of cultural communities within any urban center. The Urban Libraries Council believes that performing this type of cultural scan will lead to more relevant and culturally authentic services, collections, and programs, and will strengthen the fabric of our multicultural communities.

### **Librarians Working as Cultural Mediators Outside of Libraries**

We have established the importance of libraries in the cultural community serving multicultural populations in various capacities. Let us now turn to the role a librarian can play in working outside of libraries as organizations, but still employing the professional values and importance of conducting cultural programming. Harkening back to the theory mentioned earlier that cultural institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies are *mediating* structures between people and information; between cultural groups and records, between communities and artifacts of cultural heritage, it is also true that librarians, archivists, and curators are themselves mediators. Living and collective memories of diverse communities are validated through the acts of preservation and access, not only to books and other textual materials, but also to stories, oral histories, musical and dance performances, art, and many other forms of expression.

Thirty-nine years ago, Sesame Workshop revolutionized informal learning, leveraging the power of television to inform, influence and teach. *Sesame Street*’s first season launched November 10, 1969, followed two years later by *The Electric Company*. The original broadcast of *The Electric Company* was a revolutionary approach to media-driven literacy education for 6-9 year olds. It helped teach basic reading/grammar skills by channeling pop culture of its time to make literacy funny and hip. The show also contributed to significant gains in reading skills of American children, especially for the series’ core target audience, children in the lower half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. The show also included a multicultural cast including a young Morgan Freeman, Bill Cosby, Jr., Rita Moreno among others.

In 2009 Sesame Workshop re-launched *The Electric Company* to fully address advances in literacy theory, innovations in technology and media delivery, and creating content that is relevant and engaging to today's children, and also kept the theme of using a multicultural cast to convey the message of literacy as well as the cultural connection to an increasingly multicultural population in the United States. As a former children's librarian and library association executive, the Project Director oversaw the implementation of the content for the re-launching project. The content for the show included not only the requisite grammar and literacy skills, but also incorporated performing arts through music videos by the cast and celebrity guest stars such as reggae/pop music singer and rapper Sean Kingston. Young Adult author Jacqueline Woodson also lent her talents in a vignette, which gave insights to her creativity as a writer. American entrepreneur and founder of the Marc Ecko clothing line and its parent company Marc Ecko Enterprises used his creativity in creating urban spray paint art on camera, which revealed the words "creativity." These are only a few examples of the artistic expression incorporated within the world of television that conveys the cultural creativity within the arts.

*The Electric Company* as a project is dedicated to forging community partnerships. The project extends beyond the television program to broadband with an interactive website and outreach activities in diverse communities. Through established national partnerships with community based organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of America, public libraries, Girl Scouts of America, after-school programs and a host of other community-based educational, social, and cultural organizations, children are able to participate in the extension of their learning and literacy experience. As a component of the outreach activities *The Electric Company* Circuit Tour will consist of community events organized in cities across the United States that will include activities such as poetry contests, singing, dancing and other forms of discovery, creativity and self-expression performances. The opportunity for the children to create content and employ their artistic expression is imperative to learning and implementation of the literacy skills that they have acquired through the show and their learning process. In understanding the diversity of the cultures throughout the United States and enabling young people to express themselves creatively and artistically helps to build upon the multicultural heritage and extends the cultural connection on many levels.

Having a librarian at the core of the content creation for *The Electric Company* project makes a significant statement to the cultural community outside the walls of the library: librarians can and do embody the essence of creativity and cultural programming—we know how to assess and meet our diverse communities' needs, we are familiar with access, provision, marketing and preservation of cultural expressions in every format, increasingly in ways that extend beyond the walls of information centers and show how the skills and talents of librarians can be used in a variety of ways within a multicultural society.

### **Conclusion**

Libraries, library associations and consortia, and individual librarians have the potential to be strong cultural mediators in a society that is often fragmented and insular. As we have illustrated throughout this paper, many American libraries of all types have discovered the power and gifts that attention to cultural programming, services, and collections bring to their organizations.

If the collective memory produced by groups or communities over time also forges a cultural identity handed down from generation to generation, then what better place in the community than libraries and other cultural institutions as "points of intersection" to collect,

preserve, and make accessible the cultural heritage reflecting diverse cultures and communities. Moreover, libraries and other cultural institutions must remain cognizant of authenticity as a sociocultural rather than technical construct in its capacity to reflect the works and lives of people, as well as the events that have shaped their respective existences.

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