A web-based community-building archives project: a case study of Kids in Birmingham 1963

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Abstract Recent archival literature on social justice emphasizes activism—the importance of documenting social activism and activists, and activists’ use of archives for promoting social justice. Left out of these discussions is the role archives can play in helping to capture the experiences of bystanders—passive participants—during times of tumultuous social change. Recording those stories provides a more nuanced view of times of great change in society and helps people place their own experiences in historic context. Civil rights activists and their opponents’ racist violence in 20th century at Birmingham, Alabama, in the USA, have been well documented. The experiences of passive participants have not been entered into the historic record. This case study examines a web-based hybrid heritage project that provides a forum for people raised in Birmingham to share their experiences in the watershed year, 1963. Kids in Birmingham 1963 (referred to as Kids) contain curated first-person accounts and educational tools. The project acts as a clearinghouse, proactively marketing its content and making its contributors available for direct interviews with the media, educators, and students. The Kids project has created a new community that could not have existed 50 years ago because of segregation. Contributors and users find benefits in opportunities to inspire younger generations to join the cause for social justice. The authors propose using the techniques employed in this project and its sister project, Desegregation of Virginia Education, to develop a model that can enable communities to create a rich
historical record and make it widely available through mass media, social media, and educational outlets.

**Keywords**  Community archives · Activists · Community building · Social justice · Civil rights · User needs analysis · Model · Birmingham · Alabama · USA

**Introduction**

Recent archival literature on social justice emphasizes activism—the importance of documenting social activism and activists and activists’ use of archives for promoting social justice. Left out of these discussions is the role archives can play in helping to capture the experiences of bystanders—passive participants—during times of tumultuous social change. Recording those stories provides a broader understanding of great change in society and helps people place their own experiences in historical context. Civil rights activists and their opponents’ racist violence in the 20th century in Birmingham, Alabama, in the USA, have been well documented. The experiences of passive participants, however, have not entered the historic record. This case study examines a web-based hybrid heritage project that provides a forum for people raised in Birmingham to share their experiences in the watershed year, 1963. *Kids in Birmingham 1963* (referred to as *Kids*) contains curated first-person accounts and educational tools. The project acts as a clearinghouse, proactively marketing its content and making its contributors available for direct interviews with the media, educators, and students. The *Kids* project has shaped a 21st century community based on the empathetic exchange of experience shared 50 years later. The authors propose that the techniques employed in the *Kids* project and its sister project, Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE), serve as a model that will shape similar interventions in 21st communities with shared historical interests rooted in social justice movements dating from the mid-20th century and make them widely available through mass media, social media, and educational outlets.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called 1963 “the year of Birmingham” (Bass 2001, p. 226). That year, the city, known for segregation and violent attacks on African-Americans, became the epicenter of the civil rights movement in the USA (Connerly 2005; Eskew 1997; McWhorter 2001). King, the Rev Fred L. Shuttlesworth, and others organized a campaign that led to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Young people in Birmingham in 1963 were the focus of international attention—from the African-American activists in the Children’s Crusade, brutalized by police dogs and fire hoses, to the deadly bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963, a day that claimed a total of six young lives. Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair were killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. Later the same day, two other young African-Americans were murdered in related incidents—police shot Johnnie Robinson in the back for purportedly throwing rocks and two white teenagers murdered Virgil Ware. Yet the experiences of most of Birmingham’s children and youth have received scant attention. 
A variety of sources—primary and secondary, popular and scholarly, nonfiction and fiction—record the experiences of young activists in Birmingham during the civil rights era. Oral history interviews housed in the archives of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) contain firsthand accounts of young activists in Birmingham. These firsthand accounts have been transcribed and included in a volume of edited interviews, *Foot soldiers for democracy: The men, women, and children of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (Huntley and McKerley 2009). Interestingly, a range of publications targeting young readers have been published in recent years. These include *Birmingham Sunday* (Brimner 2010) and *We’ve got a job: The 1963 Children’s March* (Levinson 2012), which shed light on African-Americans’ motivations for being involved in the demonstrations.

Left out of the literature are the city’s black and white children who were not directly involved in demonstrations during the early 1960s. These children were not mere onlookers; in a sense, they were *passive participants*. Their experience is the topic of this essay. After discussing archival literature on social justice activism and community archives, this article will present the goals of the *Kids* project and analyze the extent to which it met those goals. This article will then describe the *Community Restory* model for user-centered community archives based on best practices from the *Kids* project and a sister project Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) (2013).

In certain regards, the term *passive participant* could be viewed as contradictory, it is a shorthand way of describing people who, while they were not actively engaged in the protests, had their world shaken by the dramatic events of those years. Growing up in the city dubbed *Bombingham*, due to an estimated 50 dynamite attacks on African-Americans that took place between 1947 and 1965, meant that all of Birmingham’s young African-Americans suffered losses: the loss of safety and security, canceled school traditions, and, in extreme cases, the death of family and friends (Eskew 1997, p. 53). The threat of police brutality and possible loss of livelihood for the parents and guardians of these children caused tremendous fear and anxiety. African-American youth who were directly involved in the protests experienced the traumas of jailing and police violence. The segregated nature of Alabama and the lack of press coverage isolated white children in Birmingham and its suburbs from many of the events of that year. Only a handful of white youth took a stand against segregation and inequality. The bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church opened the eyes of many of those white children to the true nature of the segregated society in which they lived. Despite the shared experience of living in Birmingham during these tumultuous times, Jim Crow laws effectively prevented any dialog between African-American and white children.

**Literature review**

A dominant thread in archival literature equates *social justice* with activities and activism, rather than with a set of beliefs (Duff et al. 2013). Dunbar (2006) provides a definition of social justice as a set of goals:
• To provide a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is more equitable
• To seek vehicles for actors to express their own agency, reality, or representation
• To develop strategies that broker dialog between communities with unparallel cultural viewpoints
• To create frameworks to clearly identify, define, and analyze oppression and how it operates at various individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Bell 1997, pp. 3–4) (Dunbar, p. 117).

Dunbar’s summation articulates the intended agency of the Kids project. In evaluating the importance of archives on the evolution of social justice movements, Duff et al. (2013) find that Dunbar’s definitions align with their conceptual framework of social justice. They focus on how “archives impact larger social groupings and give them the tools needed to work toward social justice” (Duff et al. 2013, p. 337).

Harris (2007) and Jimerson (2009), among others, have written about the potential of archives for promoting social justice. Biko (2005), Harris (2011), Lile (2010), and Caswell (2010) argue that archives, and institutions of social memory generally, serve as a catalyst for social change by documenting and publicizing human rights violations and thus providing evidence for redressing past injustices. Jimerson (2007) asserts that archivists have an obligation to assume this role in the progress of social justice.

Archives and cultural heritage institutions have been found to assist in healing communities with shared past injustices. Harris (2007) discusses the restorative strategy of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which relied on archival evidence to uncover human rights abuses committed by the apartheid regime. In Mississippi, truth commissions modeled on international truth and reconciliation commissions helped bridge the gap between black and white communities on issues of racism and violence (Glisson 2014). Their facilitated dialog technique “increases the range of voices of those who are deemed credible enough to tell the truth” (Glisson 2014, p. 5). Following his 1978 visits to Holocaust museums in Israel, Mayor David Vann proposed the development of a “museum-like facility” to facilitate racial healing in Birmingham (Woolfolk n.d.).

Opening records and documenting painful pasts are not without detractors. Opponents to Vann’s proposed museum, which became the BCRI, voiced their vehement opposition based on the argument that such a public (even confessional) acceptance of the past would open old wounds rather than resolve malingering historical conflict (Woolfolk n.d.). Danielson (2004), Peterson (2005), and Speer (1999) offer several examples of the moral and legal concerns that arise about access to records from covert activities or surveillance programs which were maintained by governments in order to track individuals and organizations suspected of political activism. This access itself can be a violation of personal privacy. While providing truth commissions and opening once-secret records can help obtain justice for victims of past injustices, access to such records can also put victims at further risk. For instance, the records may expose the identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) persons. Fobear (2014) sees risk of
exposure as limiting LGBT participation in refugee oral history social justice projects.

Documentation projects focusing on social activists are now commonplace. Such practices remain a marked advance upon the days of Ham’s “The Archival Edge” (1975) and the oft-cited Zinn (1971), who criticized the archival profession for failing to document the full spectrum of society, not just the power elite (Abraham 1991). Despite such progress, activist communities continue to form independent repositories, in response to perceived documentation gaps in traditional archives (Flinn et al. 2009). Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, Caswell (2014), and Nestle (1990) find that autonomous archives form because of activists’ lack of trust in the archival practices of established repositories and therefore maintain control over their historicity. Other authors including McKemmish et al. (2011); Bastian (2013); and Caswell (2013) raise concerns about the archival profession’s mistrust of communities stewarding their own records.

Community-based projects are referred to by a variety of terms. Cox (2008) and others have written about citizen archivists who form archives outside of the established repositories. The Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC) in Chicago uses the term second space to describe archival holdings in private collections and community organizations (Calahan 2010). Wong et al. (2014) write about the role of Asian-American community-based archival organizations in reshaping ideas about archival practice. Perhaps the most common term, particularly among UK scholars and practitioners, is community archives, which Flinn (2007) defines as “the (often) grassroots activities of creating and collecting, processing and curating, preserving and making accessible collections relating to a particular community or specified subject” (p. 153).

Creation of community archives can also be an explicit strategy to advance social activists’ goals. Flinn et al. (2009) discuss the close relationship among anti-racist movements and community archives in the UK. The community-based Queer Newark Oral History Project articulated its strategy of working with LGBT activists. The project’s creators, “purposely staged our first round of histories in the public sphere, using them not only to document the queer past, but also to celebrate, commemorate, and honor it in an open, collective setting— which would then become generative, inspiring further work” (Moore et al. 2014, p. 4).

In certain instances, a combination of traditional efforts that combine the practices of institutions and community groups can effectively document social justice issues. Closest in its purpose to Kids in Birmingham 1963 is Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE), a history preservation collaboration of librarians, archivists, historians, community organizations, and private citizens (Yaco and Hardy 2014). Sonia Yaco, then head of Special Collections at Old Dominion University Libraries in Norfolk, Virginia, formed DOVE with the goal of locating, cataloging, and preserving records that document the state’s process of desegregating its schools from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s. The project has gained

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1 DOVE is a sister project to Kids. Yaco founded DOVE; Jimerson is now the DOVE co-chair. Yaco is Senior Advisor to both groups.
national attention for its integration of community-based documentation efforts and digital technology to document and share this history. DOVE has created an online catalog that provides a guide to primary and secondary sources from repositories in Virginia as well as institutions including the University of Illinois at Chicago. DOVE and its host institution Old Dominion University have developed a digital collection that offers online access to digital objects, including oral histories. In addition, DOVE has trained community volunteers and professionals to conduct surveys and oral histories. In 2012, the American Association of Retired People (AARP) Virginia and civil rights groups joined with DOVE to create the *School Desegregation: Learn, Empower, Preserve* initiative—community discussions that included a traveling exhibit and oral history gathering. More than 5,000 people viewed the exhibits, and approximately 100 have contributed oral histories. For many, these community events were the first time they spoke publicly about their experience of school desegregation and its impact on their lives. With a few exceptions, people who engaged in the discussions were not activists, but were students, teachers, and community members whose lives were profoundly affected by desegregation.

By the very nature of the historic formation, archives capture the experiences of other passive participants during times of tumultuous social change. The DOVE and *Kids* projects are, in and of themselves, evidence that passive participants provide essential historical perspective. This understanding is seldom discussed in archival literature and is not a common focus of archival collections. Writing about the McCarthy era, oral historians Reisch and Andrews (1999) provide an important example of the absence of passive participants: “Those social workers most affected by the period’s repression rarely left written records” (p. 88). Reisch and Andrews cite Reinharz (1992) in concluding that “Oral histories however provide historical perspective on events and the consequences that are often omitted from archives” (p. 88). In fact, oral history is rooted in traditions of providing narratives of “social non-elites” (Miller 1994, p. 131) and “the ordinary everyday citizen” (Janesick 2007, p. 111).

By and large, archival literature remains silent in discussing how archivists should respond to community members and archives’ users, in Birmingham and elsewhere, who lived through times of profound social change and who are committed to contributing their experiences to evolving historical contexts. Many users of archives assume that their life events are represented in extant collections, such as one Virginian (and observer of civil rights actions) wanting “any evidence of the cross burning, abusive late-night phone calls and death threats he had endured when he enrolled in a previously white rural south-side high school. Where was it recorded?” (Yaco 2012). According to BCRI archivist and oral history project director Laura Caldwell Anderson, veterans of the Civil Rights Movement often visit the BCRI Archives, “seeking to find their voices in the ‘official records’ of the Movement but are sometimes frustrated to learn that there is no record of their participation. Many were too young to have their names documented in police records, even though they were held, often times for days, in large pens with other young people.” She further explains that non-activist archival users bring distinct historical interests to the archive: “My encounters with ‘passive participants’ find me more in the position of a counselor or therapist than an archivist. Persons who
were affected by the Civil Rights Movement, but unable to participate in any direct ways, want to tell me their stories of being denied permission to participate or not even knowing that a movement was underway. They want to talk about the bubbles in which they were forced to live either by parents or whole communities. Typically, they come to the archives as learners or researchers—seeking to familiarize themselves with a narrative that they realize they could know firsthand, or that they feel they should know firsthand, but do not.”

Existing research on the needs of patrons of archives seldom explores what historical materials users prefer. In general, studies of archives’ users focus on information-seeking behaviors in different user communities. “Where Is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists,” is a case in point as this study seeks, “to improve the design of archival information systems” (Duff and Johnson 2003, p. 79). Tibbo (2003) examines how historians look for primary sources and concludes that in designing discovery tools archivists should prioritize user needs and user education. Duff et al. (2010) and others decry the lack of user studies in archives, but again primarily focus on studying usability and information-seeking behaviors. The Archival Metrics Toolkits that Duff et al. created serve to evaluate users’ experiences with facilities, services, and staff.

**Background and methodology**

In 2012, Ann Jimerson participated in two social memory projects that focus on justice movements in the Southern USA. As a child during the 1960s, she lived in Birmingham. From 1961 to 1964, her father, Reverend Norman C. Jimerson, served as director of the Alabama Council on Human Relations (he was one of the state’s only white full-time paid civil rights workers). Rev Jimerson gained the trust of both white moderates and African-American civil rights leaders (Morgan 1964, pp. 127–134). When Dr King and his colleagues shifted attention to Birmingham in 1962, Rev Jimerson convinced key players, both black and white, to join negotiations. (Jimerson 2014, p. 143) On 15 September 1963, a few hours after the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Rev Jimerson collected pieces of the shattered stained glass windows from the street. He often kept items as a way of remembering or honoring events and history, so perhaps collecting these fragments was his way to bear witness to the event or to feel connected to it. Jimerson shared these fragments and his poignant retelling of their historicity with the five Jimerson children. In 2012, as the 50th anniversary of the bombing approached, Ann Jimerson worked with her brother Randall Jimerson as he wrote a family memoir, *Shattered glass in Birmingham: My family’s fight for Civil Rights, 1961–1964* (2014).

In 2012, Ann Jimerson became involved in the DOVE history preservation project. She helped to organize community events where people who integrated schools in the 1950–1990s talked about their experiences. Jimerson was struck by the importance participants placed on contributing their stories to the DOVE oral history collection. Additional strengths of these DOVE events are their commitment to connecting contemporary communities with their history, and the chance DOVE
provides for firsthand observers of the Civil Rights Movement to informally share and compare their stories.

Jimerson realized that she wanted to provide a similar community dialog for people raised in the Birmingham area to reclaim their own childhood experiences and add their voices to the documented history. Rather than collecting oral histories in group events, Jimerson planned to gather written narratives. Her project, *Kids in Birmingham 1963*, set out to achieve three goals:

- Provide a platform for people who share a common past to connect with Birmingham’s 50th anniversary commemorative events and to tell their stories. The project would help people find their place in history.
- Develop content that shows a broader picture of the Birmingham story. The project’s stories bring to light a more nuanced view of the effect of the “year of Birmingham,” showing the diversity of experiences, not only the differences between black and white children, but the range of engagement young people in each of those groups had with the civil rights movement and with current events in their community.
- Market/promote content to media, educators, and students. *Kids in Birmingham 1963* connects journalists and students to people who are willing to be interviewed about their Birmingham experiences. The project creates ways for young people to feel personally connected with civil rights history and the ongoing fight for human and civil rights.

**Kids in Birmingham 1963 project**

With her project fully conceptualized, Jimerson carefully selected a name (*Kids in Birmingham 1963*) that is politically neutral and allows members of both black and white communities to self-identify. The word “kids” creates an important historical distance from Birmingham Children’s Crusade, which was an African-American youth protest in 1963. She chose not to seek a formal attachment to any one local organization or repository. Jimerson remained adamant that the project appealed to all.

In early 2013, Jimerson began looking for potential storytellers. Laura Caldwell Anderson put her in touch with several people who had contributed to the BCRI oral history project and/or accessed the BCRI oral history project collection for research. Jimerson made connections with Birmingham natives living near her home in Washington DC and as well as national organizations headquartered there. She made particular effort to connect with educators and the media whom she believed would be committed users of the project resources. Jimerson asked journalists what content would be most useful to their work. She learned, for example, that reporters would not feature the posted first-person accounts unless they had the opportunity to interview the storytellers. She built a database of reporters who were following the story of the civil rights anniversary, especially those based in the American South. She spoke with educators, too, to learn how to make the material appealing to
teachers and useful in classroom environments. Her contacts included educational
groups, such as Operation Understanding DC and Teaching for Change.

Jimerson determined that the project would have two public faces: a website and
allied social media resources. The Kids website would contain written stories—first-
person accounts—along with an online form for collecting the stories. It also
provides a lesson plan and tips for using the stories in teaching. An important
feature of the site is the ability for visitors to request interviews with the storytellers.
From Jimerson’s point of view, connecting site users with storytellers provides an
essential continuum of the larger social justice movement. In addition, the project
would make effective use of social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to
shape a community of the website’s contributors and users and to share secondary
sources—news about related projects, press coverage, books, and happenings
related to Birmingham’s civil rights period. The project would also use social media
to draw attention to the Kids website and to establish the project as a “go to” source
for news about the 50th anniversary.

Along with introductory text, the website’s homepage contains photographs and
names of each storyteller and highlights the most recently submitted story. The
public can access stories by selecting the photograph of a contributor, the
storytellers’ name, or using the site’s search engine to identify stories with particular
content.

Additional pages on the site include:

- The Share Your Story page includes instructions for submitting a written story
  and is intended to encourage the interests of passive participants. The page lists
  possible starting phrases including, “One day of 1963 that stands out for me is
  the day,” and, “The thing we never spoke about was.” The linked story
  submission form asks for each contributor’s name, biography, some demo-
  graphics (but not race), and whether the story has been published elsewhere. The
  form also contains three separate permission checkboxes for publishing their
  story on the Kids website, their photograph on the Kids website, and for
  promotional use of both “in print or on the Internet.” Contributors can check a
  box if they would like Kids to contact them about inquiries from “reporters,
  historians, and others,” with a link offering advice for speaking to the press.

- A 1963 timeline, setting the context for the stories by laying out the events in
  Birmingham or related to Birmingham The Timeline page graphically portrays
  the events of 1963 starting from the inauguration of Alabama Governor George
  Wallace, who pledged “segregation forever,” and ending with the assassination
  of President John F. Kennedy.

- Press Room offers journalists contact with the storytellers.

- Class Room provides a lesson plan for using the stories in education, instructions
  for requesting a direct interview with a storyteller, and tips for teaching with the
  site’s content.

- Living History provides descriptions of how people have used the site in
  education.
In late March 2013, Jimerson announced the launch of the project with graphically attractive e-mail messages tailored for specific audiences, such as Jimerson’s extended family and friends, the media, potential storytellers (people who were children in Birmingham in 1963), and the general public. Simultaneously, the project populated its Facebook page and Twitter account with announcements about the project and news about Birmingham’s 50th anniversary commemorations. Reaction to the rollout was positive; the first five storytellers were pleased with the result.

Jimerson continues to serve as editor and publisher for collected stories. Some contributions came from people Jimerson herself sought out. Perhaps not surprisingly, many other contributors were referred to Jimerson by established collaborators. Some people learned about the site from the media and decided on their own—without invitation—to contribute their stories. Jimerson edits the stories, if necessary, to correct spelling, some punctuation, and, occasionally, dates or place names, but always seeks clearance from the contributor before publishing an edited version. The majority of the stories required only minor edits for spelling or punctuation. On several occasions, for the sake of clarity, Jimerson asked storytellers for authorization to correct dates or the names or spelling of organizations, places, or people. For four of the 49 stories, Jimerson worked with storytellers to construct a story from an interview or that had origins in a previous publication. In all cases, the authors/storytellers agreed to the final version of the story before Kids published it. Visitors to the site can request either unedited or edited versions of stories. Such sensitivity to the interests of contributors created an essential trust between Jimerson and the storytellers. Even for stories that were freely available elsewhere online, the project requested explicit permission from the author to publish on the Kids website. If a storyteller requested a change following publication, Jimerson made these edits promptly.

For the first 15 or so stories, Jimerson had to work hard to recruit storytellers. About the time of the 15th posting, she began to receive stories that she had not solicited. Some of these new storytellers told Jimerson they had heard about the site through people who had already submitted a story. To keep storytellers and readers engaged with Kids, each time Jimerson posted a new story on the website, and she posted announcements on Facebook and Twitter, and assured that all subscribers received e-mail announcements. During the anniversary commemoration, Jimerson made daily posts on Facebook and Twitter. In addition to using social media to attract a growing body of subjects, Jimerson accessed e-mail lists for high school reunions and the Birmingham View blog. Three weeks after the project launch, Jimerson travelled to Birmingham. She made significant connections with a breadth of community organizations including: BCRI, Birmingham Public Library, the office of the Mayor, University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Public Radio WBHM. Jimerson met a former editor and reporter for The Birmingham News, Carol Nunnelley. Nunnelley volunteered to recruit a larger and more diverse group of storytellers, introducing the project to several professional writers and journalists who had begun writing about their childhood experiences independent of any organized project. This population was thrilled to find another outlet at the Kids website.
In May 2013, a group of alumni from Birmingham’s African-American high schools, including storyteller Shirley Holmes Sims, organized a prom to compensate for all the high school proms that were canceled in 1963 to punish students for participating in the Children’s Crusade (Sims 2013). In prom gift bags, organizers included *Kids* promotional postcards that Jimerson herself designed with the intention of attracting storytellers. In general, Jimerson’s language was specific in its communication to those children who were not activists:

You lived it 50 years ago. YOU have a story to tell.

Harold Jackson was 9: “Our parents’ focus on education was uppermost in our minds when my older brother Don and I were confronted by two older youths who said black students were boycotting school that day for King’s demonstrations.”

Brenda Phillips Hong was 17: “There was the threat of being expelled, and there was that chance your mother would get you because she told you not to go downtown and march in the first place.”

Jimerson created variations of this invitation that were aimed even more clearly at passive participants. “If you lived through Birmingham in 1963, you have a story to tell,” reads one postcard that was distributed at BCRI, Birmingham Public Library, and other organizations. Nunnelley created a flyer that she distributed at Birmingham events in June inviting people to “share your memories and enrich history.”

As the September anniversary of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church drew near, national attention to the topic increased, and, so too, did the public’s interest. To help educators easily incorporate *Kids* material into their classrooms and commemorate that event, Jimerson posted a lesson plan prepared by two schoolteachers complete with objectives, interactive activities, and a rubric. The project announced the launch of the lesson plan through e-mail notices, social media, and a posting in the newsletter of the National Council for the Social Studies. Jimerson distributed a press release. On Facebook, storytellers and fans offered comments, shared posts, and in a few cases interacted directly with one another, reinforcing the sense of community among contributors (storytellers) and readers/users. Since the storytellers were reading each other’s stories, a community developed—even between blacks and whites who would not have known one another as children.

Following the anniversary commemorations of the church bombing, project personnel added more stories and the project’s use in classroom environments increased. Implementing the strategy identified during the project’s early market research, the *Kids* project began matching storytellers with other storytellers, educators, and high school students in October 2013. Student groups contacted the project to request interviews with storytellers. A group of high school students from California, for example, interviewed storytellers in preparation for an intensive study tour to Birmingham and other civil rights sites across the American South. During the students’ tour, Birmingham-based storytellers met with the class at the Birmingham Public Library to share their experiences. These kinds of interactions,
in person or through e-mail, continued throughout the project’s second year, offering some of the storytellers opportunities to share their commitment to social justice and to hear from today’s students about their own interest in activism.

The project’s substantive outreach efforts to educators began to yield good results in early 2014. In January, an African-American educator invited a white former teaching colleague, Virginia Jones, to her classroom after seeing Jones’ story posted on the Kids site. In February, Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, recommended the Kids website to its Twitter followers. The same group incorporated five of the Kids stories into their literacy-based, anti-bias curriculum Perspectives for a Diverse America which was aimed at primary and secondary school students. The Zinn Education Project (n.d.) included a link to the Kids project in their teaching materials for Mighty times: The Children’s March.

Several groups of high school students contacted Kids for National History Day, a research contest for students in elementary and secondary schools with local, regional, and national awards. In March, high school students in Philadelphia contacted Kids as part of a National History Day project. The students won first place in the Pennsylvania National History Day contest for their website Confronting Bombingham (Li et al. 2014). The website contained interviews the students conducted with storytellers who the students themselves contacted through the Kids project. Another group of students interviewed Dale Long, who was inside the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church during the bombing. In Iowa, students interviewed six storytellers and wrote a dramatic play for National History Day. Taking responsibility, walking for rights, hearing the voices: the 1963 Birmingham Children’s Crusade (Stutting, Stutting, Watkins, and Wilmott 2014). They won that state’s contest.2

In March 2014, a fifth-grade teacher in Durham, North Carolina, used the Kids website as a classroom resource for a writing assignment about the Children’s Crusade. Her students created questions for storytellers, several of whom responded to the students via e-mail. The questions included:

- Did you march in the Children’s Crusade? What was your experience?
- Did you get arrested?
- How did you feel about how the kids were mistreated in the march?
- What was going through your mind when the church blew up?
- Have you ever met Martin Luther King, Jr., or heard him speak?
- How did it feel when people called you names?
- What was it like to be in a segregated school?
- What did you do when all the kids left school for the march?

Seventh and eighth graders at Adobe Middle School in Elko, Nevada, explored civil rights for an Expeditionary Learning semester in 2014. They interviewed a number of storytellers from the Kids project and used the interviews to create a book. John Tierney, a school administrator, wrote: “Thank you for the contribution

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2 A partial list of ways people have used the site is available on the Living History page at http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/living-history/ (December 2014, accessed January 20, 2015).
towards the efforts of my students. Bridging the past and present is difficult and made even more so considering the rural nature of our community...They are amazed events like the 16th Street Church Bombing could have ever happened or that sports teams were ever segregated. Taking the time to share your life experiences helps to broaden their awareness and understanding of the world... From [the] depth of my soul THANK YOU for taking the time to connect with these young people. You have enriched their lives while deepening their understanding of the human experience” (Tierney-A. Jimerson, personal communication October 5, 2014).

In May, Kids storyteller Janice Wesley Kelsey was flown to New York City to speak at an event commemorating the 51st anniversary of the Children’s Crusade. She was among the children who were injured in that protest when the Birmingham fire department turned their hoses on the young protesters. The images of children being battered with fire hoses became known around the world. Less well-known was the resolution passed by the Uniformed Fire Officers Association of the Fire Department of New York City (FDNY) in July 1963 that condemned the fire department of Birmingham, Alabama “… for the debasement of the image of Fire Fighters by misusing them to hurt rather than to help people in danger” (Uniformed Fire Officers Association, 1963). Mike Paolucci, publicist for event organizer USA Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, the FDNY, Uniformed Fire Officers Association, and First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray, wrote to Jimerson that the event was “commemorating the historic day when the FDNY stood up for social injustice and condemned the Birmingham, Alabama fire department for its actions against the children of The Children’s Crusade and the Civil Rights movement” (Paolucci-A. Jimerson, personal communication April 30, 2014).

Although the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Birmingham events has passed, the Kids project continues to serve as a resource for the media, educators, and students. In 2014, the year after the anniversary, Kids responded to 13 requests, and in January 2015, two more arrived. Although new storytellers are welcome, the project devotes less time to recruiting storytellers and more to offering content to groups working in social justice and education. Ultimately, the project hopes that Kids’ content will continue to be disseminated in a variety of forms, similar to the inclusion in the curriculum of Perspectives for a Diverse America and National History Day projects. Jimerson is currently evaluating possible repositories to ensure systematic preservation of the Kids website and content.

Results

A year after the Kids in Birmingham 1963 project began, Jimerson queried 40 of the most active storytellers via e-mail to determine whether the project had met its first goal of providing a platform for people who share a common past to connect with Birmingham’s 50th anniversary commemorative events and to tell their stories. She asked each contributor what they gained from their association with Kids, and whether they felt they were part of a new community. Eight storytellers responded.
The storytellers were unanimous in their perspective that the project provided an outlet to discuss the impact of the events of 1963 on themselves and their families. As Deborah Walker observed, “I gained a safe place to be completely open and vulnerable about this period in my history.” James Nelson noted that he gained “much personal release” from the writing of his story for the Kids website: “I have fondly remembered one of the girls killed in the Sixteenth Street bombing, Cynthia Wesley, but suppressed my grief for too long. I thought this would be a great way to release such inner torment by sharing my story...Even my family members, including my sister, said she never knew my 1963 feelings until she read the story.” Judy Toxey used Kids as a forum to describe her father’s experiences and found that “just to express my admiration for the courage of my Dad in that 1963 environment of racial unrest, even so many years after his death, was so freeing for me.” For Ramage (2013), too, Kids offered an opportunity to help other people to understand her father’s actions, “in a public forum, the website, so others can read it to start filling in missing pieces of the Birmingham 1963 story.”

Storyteller Carol Nunnelley, who is white, said that for people who had grown up in Birmingham during the period of greatest unrest, there were ongoing discussions about “how we began understanding the events of 1963.”

Having access to the Kids platform helped storytellers to understand their place in that history, especially for those who had not been civil rights activists. Some of the white storytellers stated that they valued the chance to acknowledge the guilt and shame they had felt for participating, even as children, in a racist culture. Anne Whitehouse (2013) wrote in her story, “For years I—and many others of my generation—felt pained by our city’s shameful past. In laying claim to the civil rights movement and in celebrating it, Birmingham has sought to replace hatred with a vision of brotherhood.” Virginia Jones described the experience of being interviewed by students (through Kids), noting: “Being able to share my story with a generation that has such a different perspective has been hard at times for me. It is difficult to admit that we lived in segregation and accepted it” (Jones-A. Jimerson, personal communication March 17, 2014). Yet another white participant, Kathy Stiles Freeland, spoke of the opportunity Kids provided for “realizing I wasn’t alone in the confusion, sadness, and anger over that terrible year of tragedy” (Freeland-A. Jimerson, personal communication March 17, 2014).

Some of the storytellers see their contributions as an opportunity to further social justice, especially by sharing their experiences and values with young people. Storyteller Deborah Walker describes her experience with Kids as being “a part of a community of warriors who still are speaking their truth and who still (in their own ways) fighting the good fight” (Walker-A. Jimerson, personal communication March 17, 2014). Anne Whitehouse summed it up this way: “I am honored to be part of an interracial, progressive community celebrating the triumphs of the civil rights movement in Birmingham” (Whitehouse-A. Jimerson, personal communication March 17, 2014).

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3 Her father Edward Vandiver Ramage was one of the eight white clergy to whom Martin Luther King, Jr., had addressed his Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963).
The initial goal was to offer storytellers a catharsis as they claimed their places in the history or sorted through their feelings about the roles they played. The *Kids* project seemingly offers people who may have been “passive” witnesses to history in the 1960s a platform for contributing to activism and sharing their commitment to social justice with others. Even the whites who spoke of shame used this new forum, 50 years later, to take the activist position of inspiring and encouraging the young people they encountered through *Kids*. Many of the storytellers have expressed satisfaction with contributing to the historical record, joining a community of empathetic recall, and finding an audience with today’s youth.

The project’s second goal was to develop content that offers a broader picture of Birmingham’s civil rights history than what is depicted in most accounts of that period. In her description of the contribution to the *Kids* project, Chanda Temple, the director of public relations at Birmingham Public Library, observes. “Sure, we’ve heard the stories about the dogs, the fire hoses, and the marches. But what the *Kids in Birmingham 1963* project has done is to help add faces to familiar stories. I love that. It helps the reader ‘touch’ Birmingham and gain an even richer perspective of 1963” (Temple-Yaco, personal communication 13 April 2014).

In its first year, the *Kids* website published stories from 49 people including 23 who still live in Alabama and 13 who live in other states including the District of Columbia. The storytellers’ ages in 1963 ranged from 6 to 23 years old. The majority of *Kids* storytellers, 42 out of 49, did not self-identify as activists during the 1960s, including three survivors of the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Seven out of 49 of the storytellers actively participated in civil rights or political organizing as children or youth. They took part in the Children’s Crusade, were jailed, attended rallies, sat in at lunch counters, or organized bi-racial discussion groups. The storytellers are almost evenly divided between white (25) and black (24). Twenty-eight are female and 21 male. For 36 storytellers, the narrative posted on the *Kids* website had never been published before (see Table 1).

In its totality, the website has shared a surprising breadth of perspectives not just for students and researchers but in fact for the storytellers themselves. The sister of one white storyteller told Jimerson that until she read Harold Jackson’s story, it had never occurred to her that some African-Americans in Birmingham were opposed to the tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr. Several African-American storytellers expressed astonishment that Jimerson’s family had moved to Birmingham to join the civil rights movement.

The project has, indeed, made considerable contributions to the documented history of the time and place by including the stories of ordinary children and youth and how the turbulent period affected them. Few stories of passive observers had previously been included in the record, and several of the young activists, black and white, had been overlooked. These newly found voices recount their youthful experiences and add the perspective and reflection of looking back across five decades.

The third goal of *Kids* was to market content and interviews to media, educators, and students, and by approximation, to the general public. The project uses social media and e-mail to distribute the website’s content and actively promote the opportunity for interacting with the storytellers. Jimerson also uses a mix of
research and networking to extend the reach of the project. She tracks, attends and contacts speakers at civil rights events, corresponds with journalists, authors, or individuals featured in relevant news stories, and seeks out people with an interest in civil rights history or social justice teaching.

Jimerson keeps an informal record of requests for interviews and where and how the media and educators have used project materials. Twenty-two storytellers were interviewed by one or more people. Reporters based in Washington, DC; Birmingham; Bellingham, Washington; New York City; and in Wales conducted interviews with the storytellers and quoted them in newspaper and magazine articles. Jimerson utilizes Google Analytics, to affirm that as of October 2014, the five most frequently accessed stories were written by four passive participants (two African-Americans and two whites) and one African-American activist. Reporters and students commented that direct contact with people who lived through the historic period added significantly to interviewers’ understanding of the topic. According to Deborah Menkart, Executive Director of Teaching for Change, recruiting experienced teachers to develop lesson plans (as opposed to relying on non-educators) created an essential credibility for the project (Menkart-A. Jimerson, personal communication January 24, 2014).

The project helped to make connections for people who sought speakers from among Birmingham’s children. Mike Paolucci was the publicist for the 2014 New York City event (mentioned above) to commemorate the 1963 resolution by the fire fighters of that city condemning the misuse of Birmingham’s fire fighters. He had spent a number of hours searching the Internet to locate a foot soldier from the Children’s Crusade, where the fire hoses had been turned on the marchers, to participate in the 2014 event. He told Jimerson that it was easy to find the names of activists from the Children’s Crusade, but almost impossible to find contact information. Janice Wesley Kelsey’s name had surfaced repeatedly in his Internet searches, but until he found her story on the Kids website he had been unable to contact her. In his invitation, Paolucci wrote, “Having a firsthand account of the

| Publishing status | Characteristics | Number |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Had not previously published the story | Black | 18 |
| | White | 18 |
| | Activist | 5 |
| | Passive participant | 31 |
| Total: 36 | | |
| Had previously published the story | Black | 7 |
| | White | 6 |
| | Activist | 2 |
| | Passive participant | 11 |
| Total: 13 | | |
| All stories | Black | 24 |
| | White | 25 |
| | Activist | 7 |
| | Passive participant | 42 |
| Total: 49 | | |
terror that happened that day is paramount to giving these events their proper recognition” (A. Jimerson–Paolucci, personal communication April 30, 2014). Similarly, Kids easily put the American Psychiatric Association’s Office of Minority and National Affairs in touch with storyteller Jeff Drew. Through the Kids website, the group had identified Drew as an appropriate panelist for their conference on “Transcendence and Resilience Following Trauma: Celebrating the Triumph of the Human Spirit: The 50th Anniversary of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing,” held in Birmingham in November 2013.

Kids has actively marketed its enriched historical content, promoting use of the primary source materials that comprise its online archive and responding promptly to requests for interviews or speakers. The inclusion of Kids content in the new social justice curriculum developed by Teaching Tolerance (Perspectives for a Diverse America, mentioned above) potentially exposes that curriculum’s 6,000 registered users to the Kids community’s additions to the historical record.

Analysis

As described, the Kids project offers a unique historical space that has shaped a community of exchange among activists, passive observers, and contemporary students and researchers. Chanda Temple assesses its success: “This project gives people, especially the unsung heroes of 1963, a chance to finally share their story beyond their mind. No longer can people wish for someone to know about their story. This project gives them the power to share their story with the masses” (Temple-Yaco, personal communication April 13, 2014). Laura Caldwell Anderson points to the value of both the independence and the voluntary nature of the Kids project:

As an institution, BCRI has collected over 500 oral histories over the course of twenty years. The purpose of this work is to make interview materials—life stories—available to researchers, and our collection has primarily documented the experiences of persons involved in direct action protest to bring about change. Because the Kids site is independent—unaffiliated with an institution—and populated with content voluntarily contributed by persons who have expressed interest in telling their stories broadly and from a variety of perspectives, it is incredibly useful as an objective resource to which we may direct requests for contacts with veterans of the Birmingham experience. We cannot forget that there are persons who possess, for understandable reasons, inherent lack of trust for institutions of any kind. Such persons have, therefore, never donated their stories to an institution. There is value in the fact that Kids project stories and storytellers are offered to the public independent of any institutional affiliation (Anderson–Yaco, personal communication 13 May 2014).

Flinn and Stevens’ (2009) discussion of anti-racist community archives in Britain supports Anderson’s observations: “… while many community archives are willing to work in partnership with a range of mainstream heritage and other bodies, experience has made them often cautious about such relationships and they
frequently maintain a strong sense of independence and autonomy in their decision-making and governance” (p.6).

Among the greatest strengths of the Kids project is its ongoing use as a virtual platform providing real-world connections among “passive observers” (many of whom become active storytellers) and current students. In June 2014, the Birmingham Public Library hosted a gathering of local Kids storytellers and California secondary students. By simple virtue of storytellers (both black and white) joining the Kids in Birmingham 1963 community and their pointed willingness to speak together to visiting students, a community of shared reflection has been established.

The body of stories and community of historical sympathy shaped by the Kids project establish a community archive that is neither a traditional community or a traditional archive. This adds to the various interpretations of community and archives in community archives (Flinn 2007, p. 153; Flinn and Stevens 2009, p. 5). In many ways, the Kids project created a community that should have existed in the past but could not because of segregation. Its core members—the storytellers—mostly share the experience of living in Birmingham during 1963, yet they did so in segregated communities defined by race. One white storyteller, Mike Marston, referred to one of the black storytellers, Nathan Turner, Jr., in a Kids Facebook post on January 1, 2014, “In a sane world, Nathan and I might have been classmates. As a teacher, my Mom might have known his parents. My world is smaller for having not had the opportunity.”

The Kids project’s use of Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role in building this new virtual community and archive. A 2010 research study by Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project found that “Social media users are significantly more likely than other group participants who go online for group activities, to say that the internet has a ‘major impact’ on their ability to engage with their groups” (Rainie2011, p. 4). Readers and users of the project’s website and its Facebook page became part of the virtual community. Many have been in touch with each other by e-mail and phone, as students and journalists interview the storytellers, making meaningful and personal connections.

In certain professional regards, the Kids project might not be considered archival because its documentation does not conform to the customary definition of provenance and because Jimerson mediates collected observations with minor editing of the stories before they are published on the Kids website. Oral historians routinely make minor edits to transcriptions as they review their content with their interviewees. This practice is part of a tradition of “shared authority” between interviewers and interviewees (Frisch1990). Janesick (2007) finds that “by using oral history to advance social justice goals, the oral historian/qualitative researcher maintains an active voice in the project and may contribute to social projects in ways which attempt to equalize and balance the historical record” (p. 119).

The Kids project reflects Nesmith’s concept of “societal provenance,” in which a community’s experience constitutes a form of archival provenance (Nesmith 2006). Additionally, the original unedited stories are preserved and available upon request. The site notes, “Minor edits have been made to some stories for the sake of clarity, in collaboration with the authors.” Flinn and Stevens (2009) point out that “Most
community archives collect many materials (including objects, all manner of recordings, works of art, ephemeral items such as leaflets, posters and badges, and a range of other printed materials and grey literature) that do not conform to traditional notions of what is a record or an archive” (p. 5). Classifying the project as an edited journal or online exhibit is another option. However, Flinn and Stevens suggest that such distinctions “are not at all precise nor necessarily very useful” (p. 6).

Despite being an untraditional archive, *Kids* employs many of the techniques of a normative documentation strategy, as defined in *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*: “Documentation strategies are typically undertaken by collaborating record creators, archives, and users. A key element is the analysis of the subject to be documented; how that subject is documented in existing records, and information about the subject that is lacking in those records; and the development of a plan to capture adequate documentation of that subject, including the creation of records, if necessary” (Pearce-Moses 2005, p. 131). *Kids* is a collaboration between record creators and end users, in essence because Jimerson designed the *Kids* project around end users’ needs. The project began by considering how children’s experience in Birmingham was currently documented and what was missing in those records. Jimerson developed a plan to expand documentation of that subject, by creating new stories and repurposing existing documentation. In addition to publishing new stories and new voices, the *Kids* project brought those new stories together with stories of those who were already in the historical record. The 49 stories on the *Kids* website do not constitute “adequate documentation,” but these stories do begin to present to the world a broader picture of Birmingham’s history.

At the same time, while the project expands upon the range of historical voices of young people who lived in Birmingham, it does not yet present a full range of political perspectives. Jimerson edits the narrative pieces before she publishes them on the *Kids* website. The site includes stories of those who reflect on past prejudices, hatred, or misunderstanding, but not those who claim to hold such values today. Missing from the site are the stories from children who threw rocks or shouted slurs—on either side. One reader declined to add a personal story because she said she is still too angry about events of the time.

Cox (2009) reminds us of the value of including contrary voices, “[archives] are also not just devices to create community, and self-respect or pride, and improve identity of particular societal groups. In fact, if we were doing our jobs well, we often will hold archival materials challenging the identity or role or even value of other groups” (p. 257). He concludes that “we need to make sure that our involvement with these communities does not allow notions of pride, identity, image and other positive attributes to overwhelm the essential significance of records and record keeping for evidence (warts and all), accountability (often with its unpleasant aspects), and memory (just as often contested as not)” (p. 262).

Interestingly, marketing the site for use by media, educators, and students may broaden the range of voices on the topic and by immediate extension, the breadth of its historicity. As journalists and students interview storytellers, they bring in their own perspectives. The *Kids* project could add these secondary sources to diversify
the site. However, publishing user contributions raises other issues. In a case study of user-contributed content and metadata, Mayer (2013) observes problems regarding the authenticity of secondary sources: “users often do not contribute content in a way that allows other users to identify or assess it” (p. 42). Mayer goes on to quote Horava, “…trust saves the user’s time, keeps the user’s attention, and provides an implicit stamp of quality” (2010, p. 145). If additional sources are added to the Kids website, they will need to be clearly identified. For example, the quality of student projects varies so much that Jimerson would need to do basic fact-checking to avoid incorporating student products that misrepresent facts.

The Kids in Birmingham 1963 project has been successful in meeting most of its goals. The enthusiasm with which project participants and storytellers respond to their experience is substantiated by the positive responses received from teachers, students, journalists, and community activists. The success of these projects suggests an ongoing opportunity to develop a model for community-building projects using archival documentation, oral history, and community participation.

Creating a model for community-building archives: Community Restory

Kids and its sister project DOVE provide working experiments in online community projects with an added purpose of serving as practical guides for communities that wish to tell fuller and more inclusive versions of controversial or sensitive histories Jimerson regularly speaks with church and community groups in the Washington, DC, area about methods for documenting community history. DOVE adopted some of Kids’ social media promotional techniques. As further influence, DOVE has also added an online story-gathering feature to its website. As a kind of reciprocation, Jimerson modeled Kids’ emphasis on community building on DOVE’s technique of holding community events to gather oral histories. Combining the methodologies and lessons learned from both projects, the authors are beginning to create a model for archivists working with communities to document and share their histories, ensuring that community-building archives projects feature both activists and passive participants. This emerging model will include a toolbox of guidelines and techniques for engaging communities, reclaiming a history or using documentation to reconcile historical trauma addressing the themes described below.4

Linkages among stakeholder groups

One key to success for a community-building archives project is developing partnerships among stakeholder groups. DOVE relied on its connections with repositories and community groups to gain access to people affected by school desegregation during the 1960s. Relationships established with various stakeholders opened the door to collaborations with local and state groups, which in turn have

4 The toolkit could include a methodology to uncover sensitive or tightly held materials and a training curriculum on using the methodology: techniques for soliciting individuals to add to the community’s collection; and sample applications of social media to expand use of the collected histories.
offered funding, access to records in existing collections, media coverage, expertise for developing educational resources, and opportunity to collaboratively generate ideas for new sources of content. The Kids project also relied on building relationships among community members, the media, historical institutes, libraries, and educators. Stakeholders for these kinds of projects may include:

- Passive participants who observed moments of contested history
- Activist members of the community
- Primary, secondary, and postsecondary educators and students
- Producers and promoters of educational materials
- Scholars
- Journalists and allied members of the media
- Community organizers
- Libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions

Any of these stakeholders are potential record creators, potential end users, and potential collaborators in community building. The New Journal and Guide, an African-American newspaper in Norfolk Virginia, for instance, uses the DOVE catalog to research new stories, publicizes DOVE events, and the editor Brenda M. Andrews contributed an oral history at the DOVE traveling exhibit in Hampton Virginia in 2012. Market research to learn more about the interests of potential users would allow the programs to tailor its methods for collecting stories and records for each stakeholder group. Similarly, these findings would help to identify the products and services to offer different groups of end users and the best channels for reaching them.

Methods of collection

Community-building projects can draw from a variety of options for collecting and organizing information relevant to their documentation interests. Both Kids and DOVE created primary sources that are made publicly available and which intend to facilitate research within their historical space. For the Kids project, such primary sources consisted of written stories in a searchable online archive and the opportunity for direct contact with storytellers. DOVE created a union catalog of sources relevant to school desegregation in Virginia, established an archives, which includes oral histories, and made a portion of its collection available online.

DOVE engaged archivists and nonprofessionals outside the affected community to conduct record surveys. Using instructional designers and archivists, the project created a survey methodology and a training curriculum that will ensure that the uncovering of sometimes-sensitive or tightly held materials will be properly handled. DOVE also collaborated with professors of education to train students to conduct oral histories as part of a program to prepare future teachers to document and disseminate community-level histories.

By offering several ways for stakeholders to contribute content, each project broadens its historicity. Both projects make available online forms that allow people to write their own stories, adding to the community’s collection. Both the DOVE
and Kids projects provide community members with several options for documenting their personal stories and adding to their collections: record an oral history; write a story; share a previously written or recorded story or interview; or donate photos, papers, or other records. At the DOVE traveling exhibits, visitors brought images and documents, which staff scanned and added to the DOVE digital collection.

Elizabeth Zanoni, an immigration historian who works with the DOVE project, observes that we need to develop ways for people to add their life stories anonymously to community archives, particularly in refugee communities (Zanoni-Yaco, personal communication October 17, 2014). Laura Caldwell Anderson agrees, citing passive participants who want to talk about their experiences in Birmingham in the 1960s but require anonymity. How trustworthy are such narratives? “As archivists, we collect and preserve these first-person stories and this type of evidence,” Anderson observes. “It is ultimately up to scholars to confirm the veracity of any individual account or artifact” (Anderson-Yaco, personal communication May 13, 2014).

Although the Kids in Birmingham 1963 project developed some innovative approaches, it also built on existing models of heritage projects that create and package material for education and/or the media. One important influence is StoryCorps (n.d.), an independent nonprofit oral history project that has collected over 45,000 interviews on a variety of topics throughout the USA since 2003. Filene (2012, p. 16) found that “StoryCorps invites ordinary people to see their personal experiences as history.” As with the Kids and DOVE projects, excerpts of StoryCorps interviews are available in a variety of formats. National Public Radio airs a 2–3-min clip from one edited interview each Friday morning (496 of these aired clips are available on the StoryCorps website). A series of animated stories created from edited clips of interviews appeared in a half-hour PBS documentary Listening Is an Act of Love. Segments are also played individually on PBS stations, YouTube, and the StoryCorps website. Compilations of these edited stories have been published in book and CD format.

Access to and discovery of other StoryCorps interviews are limited. The interviews are preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Researchers must visit the center in person to hear the interviews, and only staff members have access to the interview database. Says Frisch of accessing StoryCorps material, “The current choices are narrow and binary: raw interviews in a distant archive with uneven metadata and almost no exploratory capacity, and highly polished extracts of a tiny, tiny, fraction of that rich documentation” (2011, p. 136). Stories collected in specific communities or as part of special initiatives are available elsewhere, a few of which are listed on the StoryCorps website.

Media outlets may contribute to a collection by being a research resource or donating relevant material. The DOVE project located a treasure trove of material on school desegregation, and many other topics, in a collection of cast-off 16 mm film from a local television station in Norfolk, Virginia. Yaco (2013) arranged to have the collection donated to Old Dominion University and obtained funding to digitize key portions of this collection. Magazine and newspaper articles served as a
resource for the *Kids* collection; several of the stories came to the attention of the project after they were first published or broadcast in the media.

DOVE was designed to broaden the availability of records and oral histories related to school desegregation in Virginia, even when that content was housed in collections focused on other themes. The project has engaged dozens of libraries and history institutions throughout Virginia and beyond to make these materials available through DOVE’s online catalog, greatly increasing the discoverability of resources on this hidden history.

**Outreach strategies**

Projects should identify strategies to engage community members and end users based on utilizing media that is trusted and used by stakeholders. Both the *Kids* and DOVE projects reached out initially to historically complex affected communities through key informants who are trusted by community members or through direct contact by e-mail or phone. Once these early respondents had contributed to the collections, they were encouraged to recruit friends and family to contribute as well, and they did this through in-person contact, phone, e-mail, and social media. Champions in local organizations proved useful.

Engaging the media to share historical content with a broad public requires a sound communication strategy. *Kids* created and maintained a list of media contacts by following reporting on Birmingham and civil rights through daily Google Alerts, Twitter and Facebook feeds, and e-mail notices from stakeholders. Both projects issued news releases when they could tie their announcements to upcoming events or trending news topics.

**Products and services for end users**

Another critical component of a community-building archives project is providing clear and tangible benefits and services for end users. The DOVE and *Kids* founders designed the projects from the outset with end users in mind. They researched the needs of potential groups of users to ensure the products and services offered would be attractive and would get used. For example, Jimerson wanted to get the newly collected history out broadly through mass media. She prototyped the website design and shared it with several media contacts, asking for their reactions. Understanding their needs inspired the addition of a *Press Room* page on the website and the opportunity to contact storytellers by e-mailing the project to request an interview. The *Kids* website offers its storytellers tips on how to deal with the media. When queried by DOVE, Virginia historians identified oral histories as their primary school desegregation research need. Users contacted Yaco at Old Dominion University Special Collections to find material about integration in their communities. These content requests were the basis for the oral history gathering component of DOVE traveling exhibit and a mapping function in the online catalog.

In order to use collections, educators need effective educational tools that are tied to Common Core and/or state Standards of Learning and that are age appropriate. Learning about the death of young people at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church
would be traumatic for kindergartners, but not for secondary school students. A speakers’ bureau similar to what Kids offers might be even more effective if speakers/storytellers were provided with training on communication with children or if the bureau categorized speakers by commonly requested criteria. For instance, the request for a storyteller to travel to New York City specifically asked for someone who had been part of the Children’s Crusade. Secondary and postsecondary educators and students, as well as scholars, may need less mediation and more access to primary sources in the collection. For the DOVE project, this is a union catalog of sources on Virginia’s school desegregation as well as digital collections. The Kids project found a speakers’ bureau and the option to interview storytellers by e-mail, phone, or in person to be useful to secondary students.

Teacher resources could include techniques similar to those created by existing social justice education groups. Teaching for Change offers tools for classroom and community activities, such as a parent-organizing program, Tellin’ Stories. Teaching Tolerance provides packaged films, DVDs, and teachers’ guides.

Treating content contributors as potential end users can reveal additional ways to improve the products and services. Many of the Kids storytellers who offered interviews to media or students describe the benefits they gain from participating: a chance to share their stories with people who are interested or satisfaction that their stories can motivate young people to learn from history and to join the ongoing struggle for human rights.

**Required skill sets**

The experiences of Kids and DOVE suggest that while the traditional skill sets of archivists are essential, other skill areas are needed to build communities and to ensure broad use of expanding online collections. Emerging skills include:

- Use mass media, including local radio and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to enhance community building and facilitate the sharing of historical records. The Community Restory model could offer sample news releases, and tips and examples for use of social media.
- Conduct user needs analysis and use data from ongoing monitoring to make continuous improvements to growing projects.
- Collaborate with professional teachers and educators to create lesson plans that make the project’s content accessible to students in various grade levels and in a way that complies with current educational standards for teaching history and other subjects. The model could provide sample lessons and tips for teachers.
- Engage colleges and universities in helping to implement the Community Restory model of history-building. These postsecondary classes can use newly created online historical collections as content for teaching critical thinking skills, educational methods, creative writing, and history. Possible next steps to define, describe, and replicate the model include a pilot study with one or two new under-documented communities in order to refine the existing tools to reflect the broader experience, making the model accessible to all. An institute could be established to support new and existing community archives, similar to
projects funded by the National Archives in the UK (Flinn 2007). Such an institute could offer training and technical assistance in how to adapt and apply the ready-made tools to meet community needs as well as offering in-person and remote consulting on an ongoing basis to communities as they adopt the Community Restory model. Workshops, conferences, and online communities of practice with others engaged in similar documentation projects would further learning and application.

Conclusion

The archives world has come a long way toward understanding the importance of documenting social justice activism. One of the strengths of Kids in Birmingham 1963 is that it also preserves the history of those who were affected by social turbulence and helps them to place their experiences in historical context. Kids contains elements that are included in other social justice community archives—providing a platform for unheard voices, community control of content, online access to resources, story gathering, and virtual community building through social media. Some elements of the Kids project are less common—curated content, online story gathering, and serving as a clearinghouse for interviews of storytellers by journalists and students. The project’s methods and its stakeholder-centered design further our understanding of the role archives can play in social justice. Contemporary archives can even create new communities that expand upon or, at times, fill in historical absences. Combining the methodology of Kids and DOVE suggests a model toolbox for use by other communities who wish to save and share their history.

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