

Providing Content, Access, and Service to an African Audience: The Library of Congress

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The Library of Congress has maintained a mission for more than two centuries “to make its resources available and useful to the United States Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations.” Collecting African material in all subjects, formats and scripts, continues as an integral part of the collecting mission. The Library’s digital environment continually develops also to include new research material and expanded services to its users which benefit scholars and institutions in Africa and within the African Diaspora. This paper will describe benefits of the digital environment for African scholars, educators, and the public that can be derived from this rich resource. It will highlight access points to Africana content including staff expertise, digital reference, collections, video recorded programs which are of interest to an African audience, and developments with one of the newer global partnership communities, the World Digital Library.

Impacting and making all of these endeavors possible are new technologies, services and products. Statistics and records for digital reference chart the steady increase in users from Africa and a large collection sample shows research trends from African participants. The steady increase in digital reference possibly can be attributed to the use of mobile phones and social networking tools. As anticipated, due to Flickr, the heavily used Prints and Photographs Online Catalog has more than doubled its holdings records for Africana material over the past five years. Onsite presentations from visiting scholars and authors are viewable via webcasts. One of the newer Library projects with Africana content entitled, *Chronicling America*, is a jointly sponsored project with the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP). Lastly, in collaboration with other cultural entities, the Library has undertaken the coordination of the World Digital Library, which provides training and equipment and enables national and cultural bodies to digitize documents relating to their history and culture for inclusion on their own website and on that of the World Digital Library. To date, Uganda and South Africa are benefiting from this project.