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Public Symposium on Digital Technology in Champaign-Urbana

Noah Lenstra, Project Director eBlackCU

Issue date: 11/3/10 Section: News

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For the past year the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project has worked with local youth and community institutions to digitize local African-American history and make it accessible online. In doing this project we discovered that technological barriers prevented full use of this free resource. At this free Symposium, November 5-6, the project will attempt to connect together the many individuals and institutions making differences in the lives of local African-Americans to build a network of support that can be used to enable our community to take full advantage of the technological resources that already exist and will be built in the future.

Since Fall 2009 a group of University of Illinois students, faculty and staff, in collaboration with local community institutions, have been building a digital library to celebrate local African-American history online. The project, based out of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science,



Artist Angela Rivers with eBlackCU interns in front of the Park Street mural, Fifth and Park Streets, Champaign, June 2010. L to R: Reginald Carr (former Parkland student, Sociology), Dominique Johnson, Jelani Saadiq, Angela Rivers, Jaime Carpenter (former Parkland student, New Media), Deidre Murphy, Noah Lenstra and Rachel Harmon. Angela Rivers and a number of fine artists and artists in 2009

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University of Illinois, counts among its collaborators local educators, churches, businesses and cultural heritage institutions.

number of area artists and youth in 1978 made the Park Street Mural. The eBlackCU interns made a digital website about the mural and its history in Summer 2010: <http://www.eblackcu.net/mural/>, one of many projects done by the eBlackChampaign-Urbana team to make local African-American history come alive through digital technology. Courtesy of Noah Lenstra/eBlackCU

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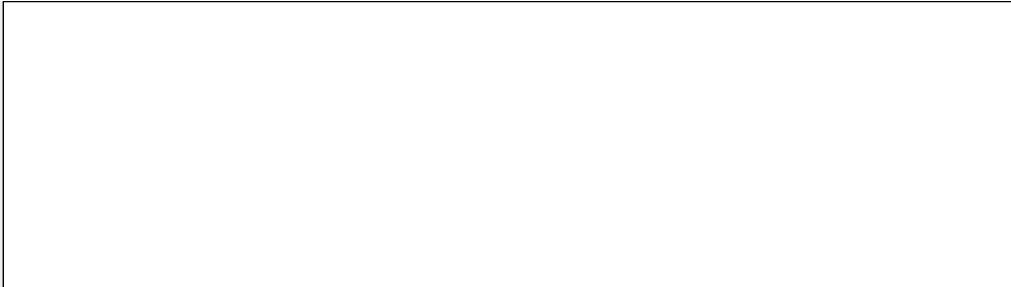
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"I learned about history and how it changed the community. I realized things about technology I never knew before. I met new people and it's gonna be an unforgettable memory," said Dominique Johnson, a junior at Urbana High School, on her experience as an eBlackChampaign-Urbana summer intern, one of seven youth who were employed by the project team to learn technological skills and help produce the digital library.

The digital library is completely free and publicly accessible, at <http://www.eBlackCU.net>, and contains over 600 digital items, including videos, church programs, oral histories, digital exhibits, newspaper clippings, dissertations and a nearly complete digitized, full-text searchable run of the Cotillion books, produced by Gamma Epsilon Psi since 1972 to help local youth attend college.

Margaret Neil, housing coordinator at Joann Dorsey Public Housing in Champaign, expressed her thrill at being able to search for family members' names and find information about them in the digitized Cotillions. Other former Champaign-Urbana residents, from as far away as Denver and Minneapolis, have gotten in contact with the project team after finding information about their families' histories in the digital library.

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From Digital Library to Digital Community

In the course of developing the eBlackCU database the project team encountered two obstacles: 1) digital inequalities in our community that kept sectors of the population from taking full advantage of the digital tools we use in this project; 2) tension between the University of Illinois and the local community that led to suspicion of this project and its goals.

Michael Pollock, social science teacher at Urbana High School, and one of the collaborators in this project said, "I have been working with eBlackCU since its inception to help the project develop in a way that is most useful for classroom teachers and local educators. This is a perfect example of the University of Illinois interacting in a positive and constructive way with the local community and helping to erase the sometimes historical division between the two."

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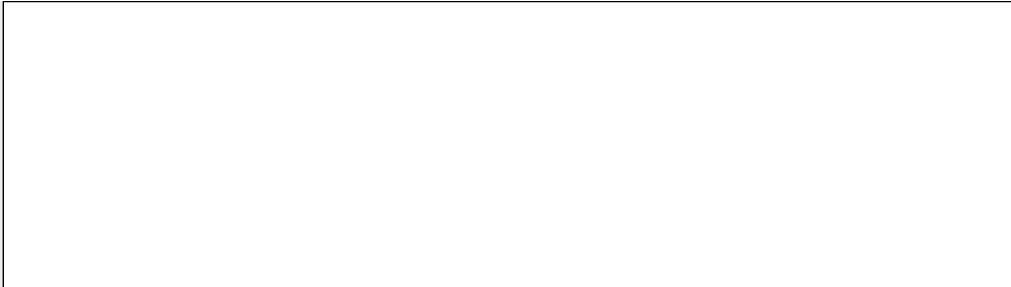
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To address both of these issues the project team is developing a free, public campus-community Symposium to focus both on Champaign-Urbana community institutions' use of digital technology and campus-community engagement. The over-arching context for this initiative is the Urbana Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B) project, which has the potential to revolutionize community life if civil society is mobilized to use the technology for community-building.

"UC2B supports the dialogue that eBlackCU is fostering through its 2-day, community-university symposium. This two-day event will allow community members to see what exists now and what is yet to come in the C-U digital community. By attending the event, participants will be taking an important step towards bridging the digital divide by highlighting and encouraging the adoption of digital technologies into the daily lives of members of the Champaign-Urbana community. This is what ultimately make this community more vibrant and ready for the future," said John Kersh, marketing director for UC2B.

Friday, November 5 will focus on campus-community engagement and Saturday, November 6 will focus

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on community use of technology. Both days the Symposium runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday will be located at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), 501 E. Daniel, Champaign, room 126; Saturday will be located at the Douglas Annex, 804 N Fifth St, Champaign. Free lunch and refreshments will be available for attendees. Drop-ins are welcome for any portion of the symposium - however advance registration is requested by visiting the project website, <http://www.eBlackCU.net/portal/symposium>; calling 244-8203; or e-mailing nlenstr2@illinois.edu. All are welcome to any and all portions of this symposium.

To make the campus day of the symposium accessible for off-campus visitors a free shuttle will run from Salem Baptist Church's parking lot to the GSLIS building throughout the day Friday, November 5. The full shuttle schedule is available online at the symposium website. In general the shuttle leaves every half hour from the church parking lot.

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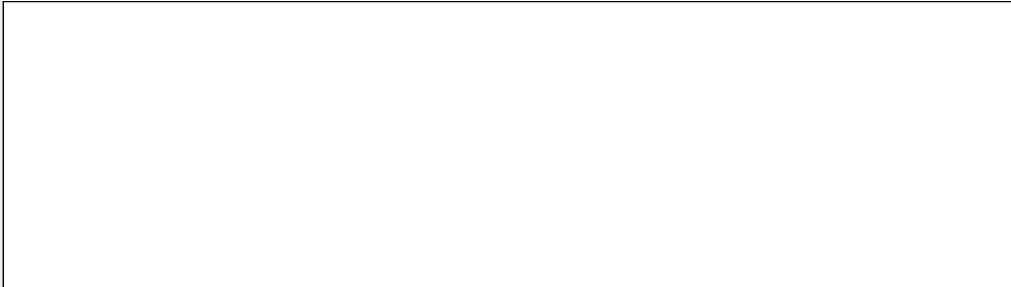
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During the symposium roundtables will be held on: Campus-Community Engagement Projects; Community-Based Research; Social Services and Technology; Education and Technology; Religious Institutions and Technology; and Community Groups, Media and Memory and Technology.

Special events include: Opening Remarks by Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement Steve Sonka; an awards ceremony and release of a commemorative booklet for Difference Makers in the lives of local African-Americans; and the release of a 200-page edited book entitled "Community Engagement @ Illinois" bringing together historical and contemporary documentation of over fifty University of Illinois projects about or addressed at local African-Americans. Free print copies will be distributed to Difference Maker awardees and online to all.

The eBlackChampaign-Urbana project is an initiative of the Community Informatics Research Lab, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, with support from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement and the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access. Community partners include the Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library; the Early

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