

## From the Archives to the Library: Authorizing Selection and Preservation

Digitization projects are springing up everywhere. Not only are libraries spurring on the digital revolution, but archives, too, are getting in on the game. Articles and books describing the various considerations and decisions that must be made in digitizing projects take a positive view; certainly, from the archival perspective there could be much to gain: access to archival materials is improved beyond measure for items placed on the web, increasing numbers of serious scholars can locate materials and decide to visit the archive in person, and, of course, having a digital copy for archival patrons reduces use of the original object therefore serving as a preservation measure.

For most of us, the enormous Google Books initiative of digitizing every book ever published is a pipe dream; selection is a necessary element of digitization projects and one of the very first steps. Amidst all of the positive rhetoric, however, certain questions have been neglected regarding selection. In archival acquisitions, items go through a process of selection and deselection by necessity. This process of archival selection, of deciding what to preserve for posterity and what to leave out, raises many issues. Two questions summarize the situation: How does the selection and deselection of items for preservation affect a society's political, social, cultural, and historical memory? What authority does the archivist have to make these determinations? Now that digitization projects are becoming common practice, there is yet another level of selection and deselection. Here, not only must the level of authority of the selector over the document be questioned, but the authority of the digitized documents must also be questioned as well – how does the absence of supporting documents affect the authority of the digitized documents? Does the necessary practice of emphasizing some documents by giving them a virtual presence reduce the document's authority over the story it tells? These questions, which arose first in the archival world, recently spilled into the library world with the actions of the EPA libraries in 2007. In the case of the EPA, we look at the authority of the record keeper (the EPA) exerted over the documents; elsewhere we look at how the authority of the document might be compromised in an archival digitization project.