Remembered History, Archival Discourse, & the September 11 Digital Archive

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SAA 2008 Research Forum
Memory Boom: Jay Winter

• 1890s – 1920s: First generation of the 20th century memory boom
  • Remembrance of the First World War

• 1970s – 1980s: Second memory boom
  – Remembrance of the Second World War and the Holocaust
Remembered History: John Lukacs

• History is the remembered – and not merely the recorded – past.

• The remembered past – a much larger category than the recorded past.
Evolution of Historical Inquires

• 18th century: the narrative past
  ▪ Written and read as literature
• 19th century: the recorded past
  ▪ Examined and scrutinized as science
• 20th century: the remembered past:
  ▪ Studied as a form of thought
Foundation of Archival Discourse

- History as the recorded past
- Association of the meaning of history with the meaning of records
- Value of records as historical evidence should be assured, not assumed
- Archival methods to preserve the historical value of records
New Archival Discourse

- Traditional: maintaining the natural course of production and accumulation of archival records
- New condition: generating records that document the “present representation of the past”
- New archival discourse: embracing recorded history as well as remembered history
Case Study

• The September 11 Digital Archive
  http://911digitalarchive.org/

• The formation of collections
• The nature of records
• The pattern of representation
Formation of Collections

- Coherent theme
- Contributing records community
- Memory collecting/storage mechanism
- Long-term preservation strategy
Nature of Records

- Experience, recollection, and reflection
- Moment of experience and moment of documentation
- Memory - refreshed and reinforced by commemorative activities to stimulate a new moment of documentation
Pattern of Representation

- Repository – purpose and scope
- Category – media or material type
- Collection – originating source
- Digital object – content and context
Conclusion

- Soliciting voluntary contributions to a theme-based collecting repository
- Recording recollections and reflections of personal experience
- Organizing and representing collectively-contributed, memory-based records