

VIRTUAL REUNIFICATION: BITS AND PIECES PUT TOGETHER TO FORM A SEMBLANCE OF A WHOLE

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INTRODUCTION

Virtual reunification offers new possibilities to create and assemble digital versions of archives, artifacts, rare books, manuscripts, and other literary or artistic works of common origin that have been geographically dispersed for historical, political, or cultural reasons. The ways that institutions with varying digitization programs, priorities, and strategies navigate this complex endeavor remain largely unexamined. This study explores the institutional challenges and barriers of reunifying a set of dispersed ethnographic image collections.

“The technology available in the 21st century offers an opportunity to diffuse the political tensions and logistical problems associated with dispersed collections by allowing us to reunify them virtually.”

ANNE MARIE AUSTENFELD
“Virtual Reunification as the Future of ‘Codices Dispersi’: Practices and Standards Developed by e-codices—Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland.” *IFLA* 36(2) (2010): p. 153

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

My research focuses on the case of Dean C. Worcester’s ethnographic photographs of the U.S. colonial Philippines. Worcester served as a U.S. administrator in the islands from 1899 to 1913. The images, which were taken from a series of “ethnological surveys,” are currently dispersed among ten libraries, museums and archives in North America and Europe.

Worcester Images and Their Respective Institutional Locations					
#	Institution	Location	#	Institution	Location
1	Newberry Library	Chicago, IL	6	UM Museum of Anthropology	Ann Arbor, MI
2	Field Museum of Natural History	Chicago, IL	7	UM Special Collections Library	Ann Arbor, MI
3	Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum	Cologne, Germany	8	Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology	Cambridge, MA
4	American Museum of Natural History	New York, NY	9	National Anthropological Archives	Suitland, MD
5	UM Bentley Historical Library	Ann Arbor, MI	10	University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology	Philadelphia, PA



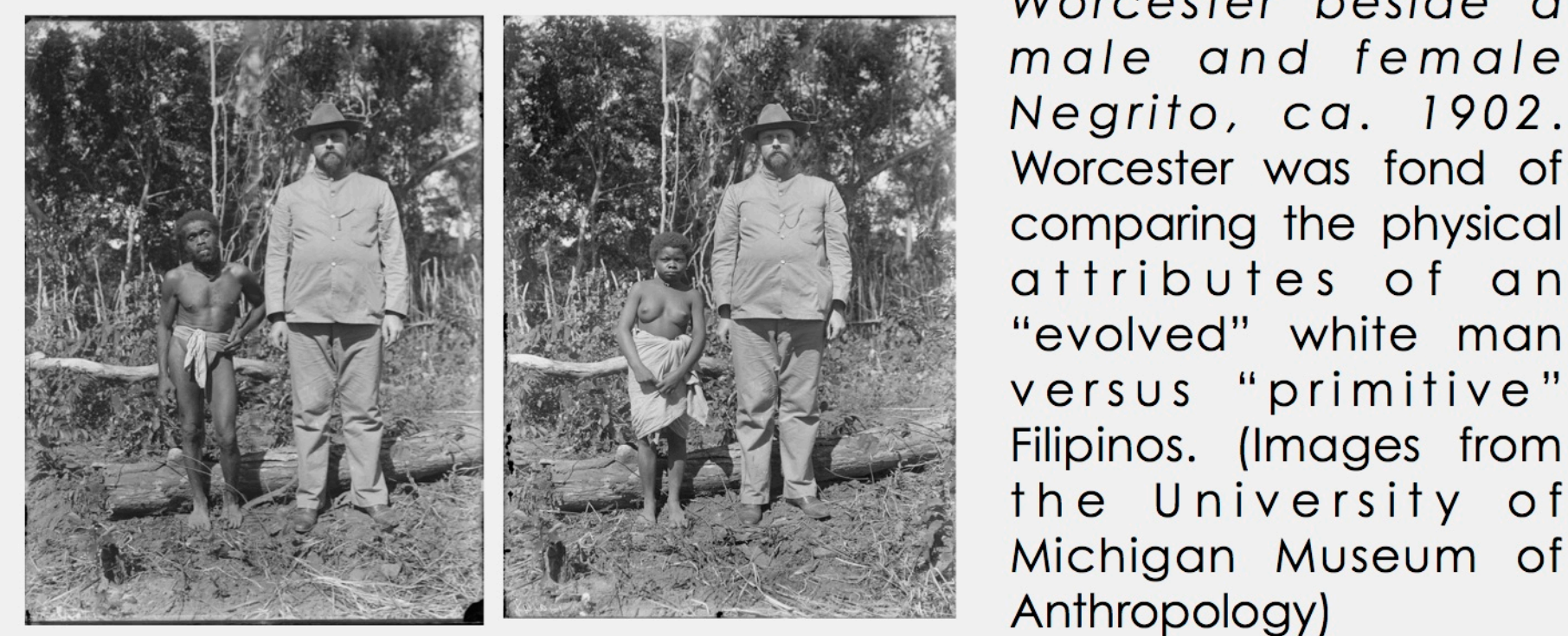
Most of the Worcester images were products of active “ethnographic surveys” in the Philippines from 1899 to 1913. Some showcase American achievements in the islands in terms of physical infrastructure, education, and governance. (Images from the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology)

What are the challenges and barriers to virtual reunification as a strategy to represent the dispersed ethnographic images of Dean C. Worcester?

- The goal of the research is to understand the context and significance of institutional barriers to reunification by:
- Identifying issues confronting key decision-makers as they consider reunification as an option
 - Describing how these barriers impact the dynamics and politics of pre-unification decision-making



METHODS



CONTRIBUTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

This research provides a rich description of important considerations that institutions face and the decisions that they must make so that the images they hold in common can be virtually reunified. The study will contextualize the issues and concerns surrounding online reunification across a variety of heritage repositories. The research contributes to archives, museum, and heritage studies, primarily towards understanding the politics and dynamics of institutional decision-making around digitization and virtual reunification.

“We can re-structure and re-create special collections along logical intellectual lines, and indeed create new “virtual” special collections that facilitate new kinds of scholarly investigation.”

CLIFFORD LYNCH
“Special Collections at the Cusp of the Digital Age: A Credo,” *Research Library Issues* (December 2009): p. 5.



This series, known as the “Igorot Sequence” in Philippine studies circles, is perhaps the most iconic of all Worcester’s photos. Published and re-published in several articles, it was often accompanied by a caption depicting the “evolution” of a “savage” Igorot warrior into a “civilized” and disciplined constabulary officer. (From the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology)