Libraries define and present the world according to classification systems that serve to separate and delimit. At the same time, libraries have a rich history of collaboration with different communities in an attempt to create comprehensive, worldwide collections in print. The critical work of describing collections and materials to connect with scholarship has been constructed around national networks and has often been done in isolation through the field of library and information science. In the United States, this work has been constructed around a colonialist, Anglophone viewpoint. A similar organization of knowledge occurred in the academy, as Paul Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*: “It should be emphasized that, where the archaeology of black critical knowledges enters the academy, it currently involves the construction of canons which seems to be proceeding on an exclusively national basis—African-American, Anglophone Caribbean, and so on.”¹ The digital age, however, has brought new opportunities for engaging with the separation and connection of library collections and materials, along with the fields they shape. Thus, proper complexity in a globally networked world demands collaboration across library, archival, and scholarly communities.

Gilroy further noted that it is impossible for cultural historians to take the Atlantic world as one single complex unit of analysis and use it to produce an interpretive transnational and intercultural perspective.² Yet libraries describe collections using a geographic and national framework, explicitly basing collection development on nation-states. This approach fosters and reifies canons based on nations. For example, libraries classify children’s literature about the Caribbean or written in the British Caribbean colonies as British children’s literature, with no descriptive terms to define the content as either Caribbean or about the Caribbean. Those works of children’s literature also matter for Caribbean literature and history, but the structures currently in place in the Library of Congress Subject Headings do not account for that complexity. In addition, although libraries and archives collaborate to plan and develop collections through formalized plans and generalized strategies
that include the use of Subject Headings, they do not sufficiently explain how collections connect to broader, interdisciplinary scholarly networks. This gap makes it difficult to see how collections are related to one another.

In this chapter, we focus on the Digital Library of the Caribbean, highlighting its history of collaborative collection development by Caribbean and U.S. libraries. It is a model for how collection development enables scholarship in diverse and complex areas. We then turn to two examples of new opportunities, which are only possible in the digital age using the collaborative practices of digital humanities, for transforming and engaging with collections. These two examples demonstrate how we can collaborate in identifying and describing materials that are not well presented through existing classifications and collection parameters. Finally, we focus on the problems and opportunities for digital libraries by considering possibilities in the digital age—real and imagined—for Caribbean library communities through digital humanities research and work. Throughout, we explore the radical potential of Caribbean digital humanities communities to make visible historical operations of collecting institutions, thereby improving library collections and practices and expanding beyond existing systems.

**Historical Overview**

The collaborative practices of digital humanities offer opportunities for libraries to engage beyond local and national contexts to develop partnerships with scholars and researchers. One collaboration that addressed the needs across both Caribbean studies and digital humanities is the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), which was developed by the Association of Caribbean Research, University, and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL).

Librarians in the Caribbean created ACURIL in 1969 to foster library cooperation in the Caribbean region, defining the Caribbean for membership purposes as including “the area of the Caribbean archipelago, the mainland countries (including the Guianas), and the states of the United States of America which border on the Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico.” ACURIL continues to use an inclusive definition of the Caribbean as connecting “all the lands washed by the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.” Many of the librarians who participated in the founding of ACURIL were leaders in their local institutions and in the Caribbean region. They created and led local and national library organizations, conducted research, taught as faculty in library schools, and contributed to the creation of critical area studies and national collections. Since its founding, ACURIL has continued to support and connect communities of library, archive, museum, and information professionals in the Caribbean with those working with Caribbean collections who are outside the Caribbean.

In 2004, leaders in ACURIL identified the need for a collaborative digital library and created dLOC, a cooperative international digital library for resources
from and about the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean. Beginning as a partnership of nine founding institutions with startup grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education, dLOC developed the technical infrastructure and training resources for a digital library. dLOC is now a sustainable open-access Caribbean library program with more than three million pages of content, over seventy institutional partners, and more than three million views each month, but its protohistory included collaborative collection development and sharing of print and microfilm resources.\(^5\) dLOC’s partner institutions continue to imagine future possibilities shaped by practical and applied activities, which are informed and inspired by dLOC’s original vision for building a shared digital library by and for the Caribbean.

dLOC’s mission of providing enhanced electronic access to materials from and about the Caribbean extends throughout and beyond the geographic boundaries of the Caribbean. Even an inclusive definition of the Caribbean constantly changes and extends farther to encompass the worldwide connections of the Caribbean diaspora, distributed library and archival collections, and worldwide Caribbean studies programs and scholarship. As with many multinational library collaborations, dLOC struggles with the complexity of the multiple definitions of the Caribbean and to connect in ways that transcend traditional information organization and geographical architectures, which are inadequate. In addition, dLOC must also work to make visible historical collecting practices, which are often obscured or unknown. By surfacing these histories, libraries can position scholars and other community members to better engage with collections and collaboration with digital humanities by erecting foundational supports for the necessary radical collaboration to overcome existing limitations.

**In the Age of Print and Microform**

Collections from, about, or in the Caribbean have many histories and trajectories. Colonial and cooperative histories are included in the materials from Caribbean countries and territories that are held in libraries in Europe and the United States, and where libraries worked together to ensure preservation and access to materials.\(^6\) The Farmington Plan provided much of the scope, definition, and methodology of this collection building. Ralph D. Wagner’s *A History of the Farmington Plan* provides a thorough accounting of how U.S. libraries worked together with the goal of ensuring that at least one library in the United States would hold at least one copy of any book published in the world. The holding library would then catalog the materials and provide the catalog information to the National Union Catalog (later superseded by WorldCat), so that scholars could find and use the materials. The expectation was that those materials would be available through interlibrary loan. As James E. Skipper explains, “The Farmington Plan can be considered as the first nationally cooperative effort to improve the availability of library resources.”\(^7\)
The plan was developed by the Association of Research Libraries during World War II, when library professionals recognized that “access to the treasures of European libraries would be restricted in the foreseeable future, and that these resources were indeed threatened by wholesale destruction.” Standardized in 1942, “the Library of Congress Classification Schedule was divided into one hundred and eleven sections as the basis for assignments of subject responsibilities.” Thus, the plan divided the world into sections based on subject categories; it then further divided the world by only collecting certain material and content types. For example, the plan excluded juvenile or children’s literature from cooperative collection development.\(^{10}\)

The Farmington Plan changed over time. In 1952, libraries had the option to accept responsibility for countries “not presently covered by the Plan,” with the University of Florida accepting responsibility for the Caribbean.\(^{11}\) Over time, the Farmington Plan expanded from only two subcommittees, which coordinated collection building within each geographical region—on Western Europe and Mexico—to include subcommittees on Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, the Far East, and South Asia. Later in the 1950s, other collaborative collection development initiatives launched, including the Association of Research Libraries’ Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project, started in 1956, as “an outgrowth of the first cooperative microfilm project at Harvard University in 1937.”\(^{12}\) New professional organizations were created to bring together communities of practice, and they, in turn, launched subsequent projects.

For Caribbean and Latin American materials, Marietta Daniels Shepard from the Pan-American Union (later the Organization of American States) and Stanley West, director of the Libraries at the University of Florida, founded the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM) in 1956. Its goal was to strengthen inter-institutional collaborative collection building work in regard to the Farmington Plan. Mark L. Grover, historian and librarian, reviews the importance of SALALM in relation to the acquisition of library materials and Title VI funding from the U.S. government, noting that it brought “faculty together from different disciplines to encourage interdisciplinary education, cooperation, research, and publication.”\(^{13}\)

During the 1960s, librarians outside the United States developed their own professional library organizations, such as the previously mentioned ACURIL. Alma Jordan, an internationally renowned librarian and scholar, traces the formation of ACURIL to the creation of the Association of Caribbean Universities (UNICA) in 1967. Yet because UNICA focused on university and research institute libraries, Jordan and colleagues “recognized from the outset that the library group should embrace other kinds of libraries which traditionally functioned as research libraries. In particular, it was felt that public libraries, which were then effectively the sole organized providers of information in many smaller Caribbean territories . . . should be encouraged and included.”\(^{14}\) ACURIL thus included public libraries and special
libraries, which were also essential and were found in government agencies and other institutions. ACURIL’s work had a broad impact, giving a “boost . . . to Caribbean librarianship as a whole—by fostering unity among library and information personnel, by developing a scholarly approach to the profession.” Jordan also notes that ACURIL “made an indelible impression on interlibrary relations throughout the region.”

Many librarians belong to both SALALM and ACURIL; the two groups maintain close connections and have similarly oriented goals and activities, including the sharing of resources and support for communities of practice.

In addition to supporting community networks, ACURIL and SALALM provided connections that were critically important in obtaining materials in the age of print and microform through interlibrary loan; microfilming of materials enabled some level of distributed access. Jennifer Cobb Adams, in her case study of the University of Florida’s Latin American & Caribbean Collection, found that from 1996 to 1997, the collection filled 10,569 interlibrary loan requests. By the mid-1990s, as internet use was growing, libraries across the world were grappling with failing microfilm reader machines alongside the ever-present concerns for preservation of materials. In response, they initiated experimental digitization projects for preservation and access. As with the print counterparts, this work was embedded within systems and practices that divided the world and library responsibility by country, as new digitization work was based on which institutions held collections and their existing communities of practice.

Expanding Horizons for Collections and Connections in the Digital Age

Recognizing the potential of the internet, the director of the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) Libraries, Judith Rogers, pursued experimental digitization and online hosting of materials from the mid- to late 1990s. Under her direction, the UVI Libraries, in partnership with the Virgin Islands Division of Libraries, Archives & Museums, won a National Leadership grant for digitization and digital library creation from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This project piloted the process for the digitization and sharing of materials online using multiple host institutions for technical and administrative operations. By making all materials openly available online, it differed in scale and in kind from print-age projects. It also differed from earlier digitization work, which sought to distribute materials on CD-ROMs as a digital correspondent to microfilm. This project demonstrated the impact of a collaborative model for online collection development in which larger institutions handled technical, training, and administrative roles while smaller institutions contributed materials for preservation and access. It was the prototype for the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC).

Since dLOC’s inception, the communities involved in it have conducted many successful preservation and access efforts, while also adding new initiatives that connect together to support Caribbean materials, collections, and communities.
In a 2011 article on dLOC, Shamin Renwick explained, “For dLOC the political, cultural and language issues affect not only the type of material provided but all of the mechanisms to do so: the coordination, collaboration, presentation and access issues.” These issues affect dLOC’s ability to achieve its goals:

Due to the colonial heritage of the region, much of the historical information resides in libraries outside the region and in various languages. Within the Caribbean, often no single institution may have a complete collection: collaborative collection building helps to fill those gaps and bring collections together from varied libraries and archives to achieve the higher goal of providing a more complete history.

To meet the needs related to preservation and access of libraries with Caribbean collections, both collaborative collection development activities and metadata systems must address not only questions on how to support diasporic archives but also on how to grapple with the legacy of imperialism within U.S. library collection development and the Library of Congress’s Subject Heading classification schema.

Library and information science professionals should work together with scholars and technologists to undertake collaborative metadata, thereby making possible a fuller presentation and integration of materials and areas. For example, in her introduction to *Una Marson Selected Poems*, Alison Donnell explains that Una Marson

is now recognized as the originating force behind the now famous BBC Radio programme, *Caribbean Voices*, that launched the career of so many of the Caribbean’s “great” male literary figures, and sometimes noted as having acted as a secretary to HIM Haile Selassie shortly after Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. The irony of her historical framing as a female facilitator to male repute can be gleaned by fuller attention to both her life and her written works.

Donnell rightly notes that Marson’s historical framing requires greater attention to her life and work. From a library collection standpoint, enabling that focus requires connecting resources across the Atlantic that may be in collections that are referenced, sorted, and structured in relation to the location where they were created. To address complex questions of connecting collections across multiple institutions, a more critical presentation is required. Donnell and collaborators have done fantastic work in this regard with new editions of Marson’s work and programs like *Caribbean Literary Heritage*.

To respond to the complexity of colonial structures still operating in a digital world, we must pursue more than just collaborative contextual work. Not only do
we need to contribute more labor to support existing collections but we also need to seek new voices from additional perspectives and fields.

**Connecting Collections across the Atlantic: Opportunities**

Digital humanities, complemented by collaborative activities to connect across boundaries, presents opportunities to redress the long history of collection building as defined by dividing the world. Jacqueline Wernimont and Elizabeth Losh redefine digital humanities’ scope: “as digital humanists, we need to move from a focus on populating the archive to a focus on animating the archive to get beyond a politics of minimal representation.”

Similarly, Moya Bailey, Anne Cong-Huyen, Alexis Lothian, and Amanda Phillips call on practitioners in the digital humanities to shift “the digital humanities from technical processes to political ones, and always seek to understand the social, intellectual, economic, political, and personal impact of our digital practices as we develop them.”

These calls support Kim Gallon’s work on a technology of recovery, which demands that archives, collections, and communities illuminate the history of work in Black Studies and the digital humanities. The two examples that follow illustrate the need for collaborative work across different disciplines and communities to change the systems that inhibit rather than aid our collaborative work.

First, because libraries have historically defined materials based on subject classifications and geographical regions, historical children’s books relating to the Caribbean are buried and often not accessible even to librarians and other professionals trained in advanced searching techniques. Given that the creation of bibliographies has largely been the province of library and information science, these works can unintentionally perpetuate outdated nation-state classifications. To highlight important books containing materials relating to historical events, colonialism, and the shift in Anglophone attitudes toward other cultures, significant collaboration is required among scholars, librarians, and digital humanists.

One bibliography that has benefited from such collaboration is *Guiding Science: Publications by Women in the Romantic and Victorian Ages*. Originally conceived as a project by one librarian and one scholar, the digital project has grown to include contributions from students at Georgia Tech. Although the identification of books relies on Library of Congress Subject Classifications, the bibliography includes close text analysis through scholarly annotations. This provides valuable and searchable context that supplements traditional, colonial-based subject headings and can be used to augment catalog records and other online resources.

Adelaide O’Keeffe’s *National Characters Exhibited in Forty Geographical Poems* is an important text used in educating elementary age British children. One of the forty poems is “The Jamaica Slaves,” a searing account of a woman who is about to be flogged before she is saved, at the last minute, by an abolitionist plantation owner. But O’Keeffe’s work is described under three broad subjects—“Children’s poetry,”
“Conduct of life—Juvenile poetry,” and “National characteristics—Juvenile poetry”—none of which referenced its content. It was only with careful analysis of the text that the curator of the Baldwin Library discovered how important the text is for Caribbean scholars. With no subject headings relating to the Caribbean region, the only way to determine whether a book contains historical information on the Caribbean is through careful analysis of the text. To hasten and make bibliographies useful to work on historical texts, catalogers, librarians, and scholars must work together to supplement traditional colonial-based subject headings with expanded catalog records and online bibliographies to emphasize connections from the Caribbean’s colonial history. Digital humanists who are trained in text mining could partner with libraries to analyze numerous texts at a time, which can speed up the process of identifying hidden materials.

Second, cross-national and international collaborations with European countries may also be essential to highlighting hidden historical resources on the Caribbean. This is the case for *Le Progressiste: organe du Parti Progressiste Martiniquais*, an influential weekly newspaper published by the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (PPM), which was founded by Martiniquan poet and politician Aimé Césaire. The newspaper provides a fuller understanding of the PPM’s development and gives scholars insight into Césaire’s ideas, views, and concerns, as well as those of his fellow PPM members. Césaire also used the publication as a tool to explore Martinique’s relationship to France.

When the University of Florida received a generous donation of 1,172 issues of *Le Progressiste* from Dr. Thomas Hale, a renowned international scholar on Césaire and West Africa, it became the largest holder in the world of this newspaper’s issues in print and not microfilm; it also had the longest date range of those issues, starting from *Le Progressiste*’s creation in 1958 and continuing through 2009. Ironically, this newspaper was available in only twenty-two libraries in the world, none of which were in Martinique. Digitization of this resource was essential to provide full access to this material, particularly at a time when global interest in Césaire and his work is growing. Indeed, much bibliographic research has been done recently, notably by Thomas Hale and Kora Véron, bringing to light Césaire’s own writings and the many secondary sources connected to him. Alex Gil’s mapping project shows where the scholarly work on Césaire is being published and highlights the reach his writings have had in the world. Not only are there hundreds of secondary sources from North America, Europe, and the Caribbean but they also come from Africa and, perhaps more surprisingly, from Japan. Therefore, digitizing *Le Progressiste* offered Césaire and Caribbean studies scholars, as well as those from and in the Caribbean, a major resource pertaining to the history of Martinique, France, Négritude, and Francophone politics by making it openly accessible. It also contributed to enriching and facilitating existing scholarship.

However, merely digitizing 1,488 issues and having them openly online in dLOC is not enough to guarantee their use and readership. Libraries and other cultural
institutions also need to ensure that these materials can be widely disseminated and used as much as possible. One way for dLOC to support connection is through its library partners. The Bibliothèque Numérique Caraïbe Amazonie Plateau des Guyanes (MANIOC) is a dLOC partner and a French Caribbean digital library based in Guadeloupe and Martinique. MANIOC can reach users who may not be familiar with dLOC and can help promote access to *Le Progressiste* through the creation of French and French Creole metadata to describe online content, which is not currently available in these languages on the dLOC website, as well as through providing teaching and instruction sessions to their partners.

Another way to promote *Le Progressiste* is through the Collaborative Initiative for French Language Collections (CIFNAL). One of CIFNAL’s goals is to support and facilitate the exchange of resources between Francophone and North American libraries. In 2018, CIFNAL’s Collection Development Working Group created both a guide of Francophone digital humanities projects and a searchable database of French and Francophone special collections in North America. *Le Progressiste* is featured in this guide, which can help librarians not only in North America but also in Francophone countries access it through CIFNAL’s reach and connections. And thanks to these librarians, more users are made aware of this digitized resource.

Finally, another way to increase *Le Progressiste*’s reach is to develop collaborative digital partnerships with European institutions that often have significant resources on the Caribbean as a legacy from their colonial invasions. These European libraries continue to work within the Caribbean and across the world to connect with scholarly and public communities that can further connect, provide context, and undertake the complex work for the meaningful placement of materials.

In the early 2000s, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) partnered with the Library of Congress and the National Archives to develop the digital library, “La France en Amérique / France in America.” In 2018, the BNF decided to revamp the website and to expand the collections available on it. Although the dates of materials for this project only go until the early twentieth century and thus before publication of *Le Progressiste*, this initiative demonstrates a successful international partnership to offer connected presentations of materials with built-in context, as opposed to purely classification based on national boundaries.

These two simple examples—of a bibliography of children’s books and of a single newspaper—are both complicated by the need for crossings and connection and the limitations of traditional library systems.

**Digital Humanities to Transcend and Transgress Traditional Boundaries**

The Caribbean library community has a long history of collaboration, which is required to address the challenges facing library, archival, and museum collections
in the digital age. Digital humanities communities from or about the Caribbean possess the transformative potential to come together and both make visible the historical operations of libraries and collecting institutions and illuminate the gaps, absences, and breaks in collections. Through radical collaboration among multiple user groups, we can improve library collections in the digital age and transcend entrenched and invisible systems. As Susan Leigh Star and Martha Lampland explain in “Reckoning with Standards,” standards “codify, embody, or prescribe ethics and values.” Libraries and users too often take classification systems as an invisible infrastructure that operates with neutrality. Digital libraries present an opportunity for scholars and information and cultural heritage professionals to come together to explore shared needs and achieve shared goals that can inform changes that better represent and present the world.

The success of archipelagos and the Caribbean Digital conference series (2014–present) in this regard has engendered discussions across communities and at specific events. Those discussions have covered the “if” and “how” to support findability for Caribbean digital humanities projects. For instance, how do we ensure standardized and ongoing support by shared cataloging or metadata creation communities in ways that connect to existing library systems, so that non-experts can find the resources using general research practices? If creating records for findability within existing catalog systems is necessary, so too is creating a means for sharing information about Caribbean digital humanities work, such as the multiple THATCamps (these are unconference events focused on the humanities and technology) in the Caribbean or Create Caribbean, the first DH center in the Caribbean. Creating records or a directory is not a new approach, but with stronger engagement with scholars and other uses of digital libraries, new materials and collections will become truly accessible in material (online), meaningful (in context), and transformative (in context and connection for the materials to be used for individual and collective change) ways. Transformational access cannot be enabled by technologies alone; radical collaboration is required to focus on our collaborative work, to imagine new ways of working, and to connect across our local placements in countries, professions, and systems.

With so much important work underway, the next steps require even more collaboration, promotion, and support across our communities. Just as with the world-defining, foundational work by ACURIL in organizing communities of practice, digital practitioners in Caribbean studies are now called to collaborate on collections using the many new opportunities, such as with groups like dLOC and Caribbean Literary Heritage. The new master’s degree program in archival studies offered online at the UWI Mona campus, discussions of digital humanities majors or programs at UWI, the rising Caribbean Diaspora Digital Humanities Center at the University of Puerto Rico, and other initiatives will support such collaborations. As librarians, we hope to join with more collaborators for the next stages of community development for engagement with collections.
Notes

2. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 15
3. Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL), *ACURIL History*.
5. dLOC, “History of Collection-Level Usage.”
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