

COLLABORATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARIES

Substantial multimedia digital libraries, built with partners from around the world.



The United States and Brazil Web site from the Library of Congress's Global Gateway Project is a forerunner of the World Digital Library. (Courtesy Library of Congress)



CONNECTING CULTURES ON THE INTERNET

Art, literature go online in global library

The U.S. Library of Congress recently launched an initiative to create a World Digital Library of historic, artistic, and literary works from around the globe. The project's goal is to bring together online rare and unique items held in U.S. and Western repositories with those of other great cultures, such as East and South Asia, and the Islamic nations stretching from Indonesia through Central and West Asia to Africa. "A World Digital Library would make these collections available free of charge to anyone accessing the Internet," said James H. Billington, head of the Library of Congress, "and it could well have the salutary effect of bringing people together by celebrating the depth and uniqueness of different cultures in a single global undertaking."

Billington proposed the concept of a World Digital Library in a June 2005 speech to a meeting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. He announced the project's launch in November with a \$3-million grant from the Web search company Google. The Library of Congress will use the money to develop technical and organizational details and to reach out to nations and institutions around the globe to participate in this international endeavor. More private-sector partners will be sought to provide funding and expertise.

The World Digital Library builds on major digital documentary projects at the Library of Congress. Over the past decade, the library has digitized more than 10 million items for the American Memory Project, a collection of U.S. manuscripts, maps, audiovisual recordings, photographs, music, and other materials. A second project begun in 2000, the Global Gateway, is a cooperative effort with the national libraries of Brazil, France, the Netherlands, Russia, and Spain. The bilingual multimedia presentations concentrate on historical connections between the United States and the contributing nations. By contrast, the World Digital Library will focus on participating nations' own cultures and histories. The virtual library will include only materials that are in the public domain or made available with special permission.

"I believe that we have both an opportunity and an obligation as a nation to form a public-private partnership to use the new technology of the Internet to help celebrate the creative cultural variety of the world," said Billington. "The dream is that this could make a contribution, particularly among young people brought up in the multimedia age."

For more information on the World Digital Library, go to <http://www.loc.gov>.