

MUSEUMS IN MOTION TODAY

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We came together at the American Alliance of Museums' 2016 Annual Meeting for a session discussing the idea of a culturally responsive database.

As we digitize and share holdings online, we recognize a need to also record and share robust data that makes our digital collections accessible in exciting ways. The data we collect, manage, and share should reflect the diversity and richness of our collections and the communities we serve. How does an inclusive database provide access, enhance meaning, and make new connections for a museum's collection? Considering that every museum's collection and mission is different, what might a culturally responsive database look like? How do cataloguers build a database that is respectful and reflective of multiple cultures and communities?

At NMAAHC, one of our priorities is to be mindful of how we catalog identities. The interrelated concepts of identity and freedom reverberate throughout our collection, often through the stories of individuals who historically have been underrepresented. Our cataloguing incorporates multiple interrelated identities, including race, gender, sexuality, occupation, and nationality, without reducing an individual to a particular identity in a way that segregates them from dominant cultures. We aim for representation without othering.

Cataloguers continually examine language choices, taxonomies, authorities, access, and other aspects of data management for both functionality and inclusivity. Our process is ongoing and cooperative, and we look forward to working with the wider museum community to create best practices for building culturally responsive databases.

Figure 1:

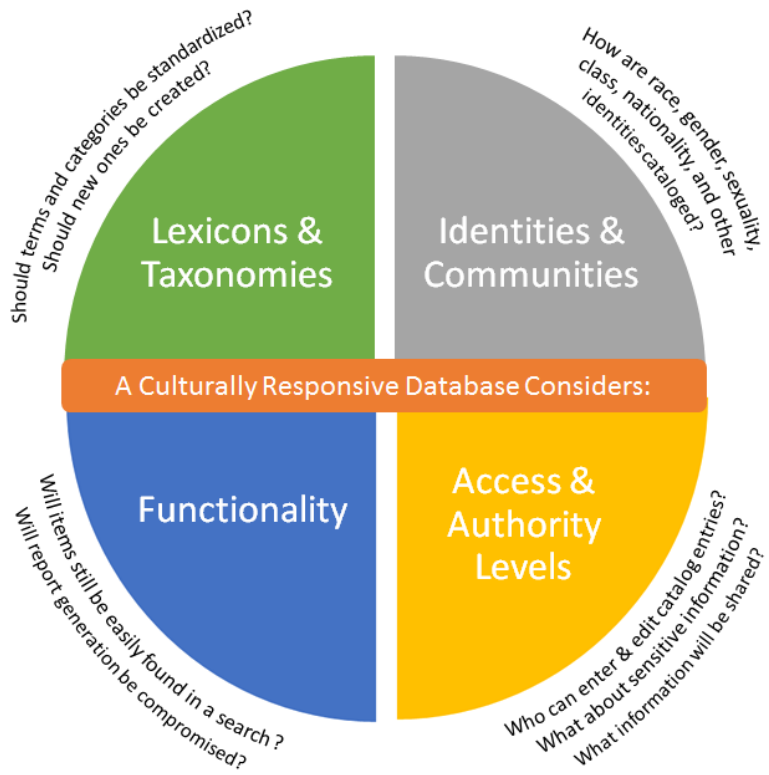
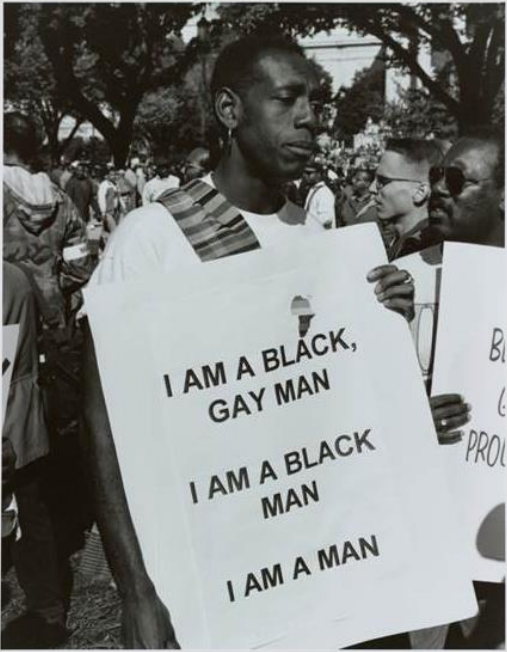


Figure 2

<i>I Am a Man</i>	
CREATED BY:	Roderick Terry, American
SUBJECT OF:	Unidentified Man or Men
PRINTED BY:	Penn Camera, American, 1954 - 2012
MEDIUM:	silver and photographic gelatin on photographic paper
DIMENSIONS:	H x W (Image): 13 11/16 x 10 5/8 in. (34.8 x 27 cm) H x W (Sheet): 14 x 11 in. (35.6 x 27.9 cm)
TYPE:	gelatin silver prints
PLACE DEPICTED:	National Mall, Washington, District of Columbia, United States
DATE:	October 16, 1995
CLASSIFICATION:	Media Arts-Photography
TOPIC:	African American Activism Civil Rights Gender Identity Local and regional Men Photography Sexuality United States--History--1969-2001
CREDIT LINE:	Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Roderick Terry
OBJECT NUMBER:	2013.99.44
RIGHTS:	© Roderick Terry
SEE MORE ITEMS IN:	National Museum of African American History and Culture Collection
PORTFOLIO/SERIES:	One Million Strong
DATA SOURCE:	National Museum of African American History and Culture



I Am a Man, 1995,
Roderick Terry

Pictured here is a view of NMAAHC's digital record for the photograph *I Am a Man* by Roderick Terry. Taken at the Million Man March, the image features a man holding a sign reading, "I am a black, gay man / I am a black man / I am a man." The phrase "I am a man" is frequently used as a declaration of civil rights and, as used here, is a statement that the man in the photograph holds all of these identities simultaneously and equally. He is no less a man because he is a black man, and he is no less a black man because he is a black, gay man. In our cataloguing, this intersectionality is reflected by using the terms "African American" and "Men" separately instead of collapsing these identities into the term "African American men." Functionality is not compromised as a combined search on both terms results in objects relating to men who are African American, without treating African American men as a separate category, removed from the larger category of "Men."

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