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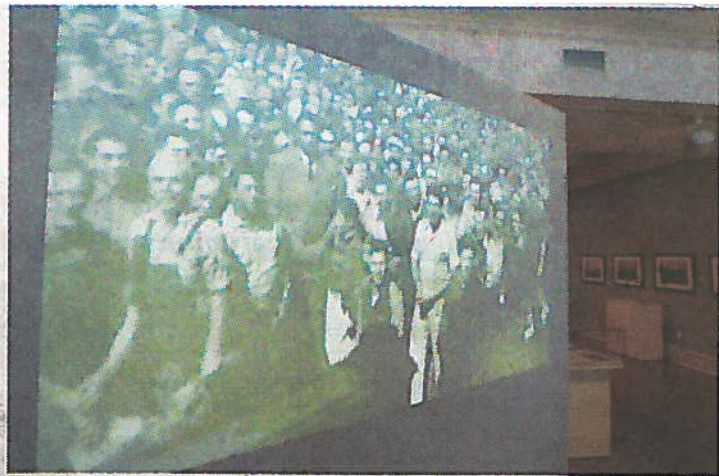
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MONDAY,

APRIL 22, 2013



ALL: ERIC RISBERG/AP

Heritage: An exhibit at the California Historical Society in The City shows activist Paul Robeson singing to workers at an integrated Oakland shipping yard in 1942.

S.F. experiment making history a group effort

By Jason Dearen
The Associated Press

The photo taken in 1942 shows singer and civil-rights activist Paul Robeson serenading a sea of black and white workers at Oakland's Moore Dry Dock Corp., one of the Bay Area's first integrated shipping yards.

In early April, Rue Mapp, whose father was a Moore dockworker, scanned the old picture she'd found at the Oakland Public Library into a computer at the California Historical Society. The image was beamed onto a screen, instantly becoming part of the society's new experimental exhibit of Bay Area history.

"Moore Dry Dock represented this new economic and social frontier for African-Americans to have the chance to prosper and thrive, no longer under the shadow of the Jim Crow South — and my dad did just that," 42-year-old Mapp said. "The Robeson photo captured my imagination because he is somewhat of an enigma for my generation. And the photo locates him not only in my hometown, but also at the place my father worked."

The photograph and Mapp's family memories were little-known pieces of the Bay's history — but in an instant both became part of an academic project blending two of the region's resources: technology and people.

The 142-year-old historical society may seem an unlikely place for innovation, but its new exhibit is using crowdsourcing — organizing people online to contribute to a project — to find new stories about the Bay. Historians hope the technique will help them unlock a richer, deeper historical portrait.

The project is being led by UCLA historian Jon Christensen as part of his work studying the Bay's environmental history. But the project goes



State lore: Historian Jon Christensen is leading a crowdsourced exhibit at the California Historical Society in The City.

beyond just Christensen's project, seeking to create an online database of photos and stories from which historians of all stripes can benefit.

The idea is to augment the traditional source material used by historians — often the story as told by an era's most powerful people or biggest events. Stories and historical materials from other racial and economic groups were less collected and archived, leaving gaps in the record.

The crowdsourcing project uses a website called Historypin, where anyone with computer access can upload a photo, pin the picture's location onto a Google map and set a date range for when it was made. Historians at Stanford University also are participating.

The exhibit can be found online under the Historypin "channel" YearoftheBay.org, where visitors will find a map with links to the photographs sorted by geographic area and spanning more than a century of time.