

## Minnesota 2.0: Digital Media and Story-Telling by Immigrant Youth

How are immigrant and refugee youth in Minnesota using the new social networking sites—YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc.? That is the question to be addressed by an IHRC team of graduate and undergraduate researchers during academic year 2009-2010. Funding for the project comes from the Fesler-Lampert Chair in the Public Humanities, which will be held this year by IHRC Director Donna Gabaccia. Assisting Gabaccia will be Cultural Studies Ph.D. student Justin Schell and History Ph.D. student Anduin Wilhide. Later undergraduate research assistants will be hired to work on the project.

Theorists of globalization encouraged scholars of international immigration to expect radical social consequences of the new, and now increasingly digital, means of communication available via the world wide web. Social scientists have studied the degree to which immigrants and refugees of varied ages and generations have access to computers and to the worldwide web. The focus of this research project, by contrast, include some of the main humanities themes in the study of immigration. In particular we are interested to document and to understand how social networking sites have opened ways for 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation youth to express their emerging sense of identity and social connection – to Minnesota and the U.S., to their parents and communities, to each other, and to the homelands from which their families recently arrived. Although ostensibly a public space, many young people experience chat rooms, message boards, and MySpace pages as intimate. There, immigrant and refugee youth—like other young Americans—share thoughts, poetry, pictures, videos, songs, visual art. They also communicate with others and offer distinct portraits of their own, evolving lives.

With its physical storage caverns now full to overflowing, the IHRC has experienced new challenges in working with new immigrant groups settling in the Twin Cities. Committed to documenting and preserving their stories, too, the IHRC uses support from the Fesler-Lampert Chair in Public Humanities to create a webpage and CD that will preserve and give access to future generations of researchers to the stories and points of view of Minnesota's immigrant and refugee youth.

Throughout the year, the IHRC will sponsor events related to the project "Minnesota 2.0." We want university students, faculty, and immigrant and refugee communities to recognize the significance of the documents that youthful writers, video-makers, poets, and musicians are creating in digital form. By fall 2010, we hope to have ready a website (which will also be "captured" as a CD) for researchers interested in identity and life among the 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of new Americans.