Please pardon our appearance while we work on our transformation
Our blessing and our curse

• Collections vary in scope, depth, subject
• All formats
• Varying practices of description in the past
• Scholarship originating from collections varies widely
• Grounded in the university but serving everyone
Western Union

 transmitter id: KA213

 Recipient: CHARLES S SCOTT

 Address: 410 KANSAS AVE TOPEKA KANS

 Message: HAVE JUST RECEIVED INFORMATION ON LATEST ACTION TOPEKA SCHOOL BOARD COMPLETELY ABOLISHING ALL SEGREGATION SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR. PLEASE ADVISE

 Recipient: THURGOOD MARSHALL

 Date: 1955 APR 6 AM 11 58

 Symbols:
 DL = Day Letter
 NL = Night Letter
 LT = Letter Telegram
 VLT = Inc'l Letter

 Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.
The opportunity

• Many people set foot in KSRL for the first time to attend an event in the North Gallery
• Open bookstacks are compelling evidence of the primacy of our physical collections
• Other spaces, including reading room and exhibit space, had been renovated to work better and help us better tell our stories
What didn’t work

• Leaving things as they were
• Our traditional approach to exhibit planning
• Doing it ourselves
• Trying to fit it all in somehow
• We needed help
Who are our audiences?

- Casual visitors / walk-ins
- Purposeful visitors (tours)
- Researchers
- Donors
- Students
- University leadership
- Potentially everyone!
What story do we want to tell?

• People
• Events
• Artifacts
• It all comes down to collections! (at least that’s what we thought)
The process

• Biweekly meetings
• Weekly calls with designer
• Several consultant visits
• Lots of hair pulling
• Drafts and edits and proofs and more edits and proofs
The Team

- 2 curators
- 1 archivist
- 1 head of public services
- Director of KSRL
- InterActive Group
- Stacks & facilities support
- Digitization, conservation, etc.
Key components

• Bring out examples of ALL collections
• Multiple formats (not just books)
• Give the casual visitor a sense of our mission and purpose
• Education (it’s a fine line ...)
• Help build advocacy on and off campus
Tensions

• Experts vs. casual visitors
• Selectiveness vs. comprehensiveness
• The past vs. the future
• Legacy donation vs. new money
• The “library way” vs. the “museum way”
In the meantime

• Generous estate gift expanding scope of project
• Much bigger footprint, lighting, window shades, etc.
• Delays, delays, delays
The exhibit is just the beginning:

- Publicity (also aimed at multiple audiences)
- Self-guided tour (especially for accessibility)
- Everything is modular / updateable
- Audio & projection capabilities for events
- Regular drop-in tours
- Staff education and acceptance
- Ongoing fundraising / outreach
The stories we tell (now)

- Importance of primary sources
- Our role as campus partner
- You are welcome here!