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Public Works Projects for the Internet

January 18, 2008

The Honorable Cristián Samper, Acting Secretary
The Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Secretary Samper:

It was with great interest that I read of the recent initiative by the Library of Congress and Yahoo! to create The Commons, a collection of photographs with “no known restrictions” on the popular Flickr photo-sharing service.

As Matt Raymond, the project director for the Library of Congress said in his blog: “As a communicator, I want to expand the reach of the Library and access to our magnificent collections as far and wide as possible.” Mr. Raymond goes on to say “if all goes according to plan, the project will help address at least two major challenges: how to ensure better and better access to our collections, and how to ensure that we have the best possible information about those collections for the benefit of researchers and posterity.”

As you know, Public.Resource.Org has been active in helping disseminate photographs from the Smithsonian Institution’s equally impressive photographic collection. With the permission of your curators, we have been able to post 600 dpi photographs of Muybridge Cyanotypes for unrestricted use on Flickr.

Today, I would like to invite you to join with Public.Resource.Org in making even more high-resolution photographs available as part of The Commons initiative.

Specifically, I would propose working with the Institution’s Director of New Media to identify 2,000 images that could be made available as 300 dpi images on Flickr, with a specific emphasis on American History and American Culture, two areas in which the Smithsonian collection is particularly strong. We propose this medium-resolution format, allowing the Institution to continue to derive revenue from high-resolution sales.

Recognizing that making images available requires effort on the part of the Smithsonian, I would like to propose that we split those costs with you. In particular, the cost per image is \$50 for delivery on CD, for a total cost of materials of \$100,000 for the 2,000 images. Public.Resource.Org would be pleased to offer an unrestricted grant of \$50,000 to assist in your participation in this project.

Public.Resource.Org is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, created to establish public works projects on the Internet. We have worked with a variety of agencies across the Federal government to achieve our goal of broader dissemination of public domain materials. For example, we have worked with 4 congressional committees to make high-resolution video from hearings available. Likewise, Public.Resource.Org, under Joint Venture Agreement No. NTIS-1832, is working with the National Technical Information Service on our "FedFlix" program, releasing 10-20 new videos per month back into the public domain.

We would be honored with the opportunity to work cooperatively with the Smithsonian Institution to help create a broader dissemination of portions of your photographic collection.

Best regards,

Carl Malamud
President & CEO
Public.Resource.Org, Inc.

cc: Ms. Ann Speyer, Chief Information Officer
Ms. Linda St. Thomas, Office of Public Affairs
Mr. Michael Edson, Director of Web and New Media Strategy