

# US Museums Connect Online Game with On-Site Experience

**In an era of Twitter, gaming and online avatars, are history museums history? Nine American museums prove otherwise.**

**New York, NY, May 18, 2011**— [America 2049](#), a new interactive Facebook game, is taking the participatory museum experience to the next level. Created by human rights group [Breakthrough](#), America 2049 asks players to decide the nation's future by looking to the past, using actual visits to historic Sites of Conscience to connect past to present, online to on-site.

Nine museums – all members of the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#) – have teamed up with Breakthrough to offer players a chance to meet in person and explore history on-site. Through public programs like special events and tours, visitors learn about the real-life events that inspired different parts of America 2049's fictional game world.

America 2049 drops players into an alternate reality of the near future, where for 12 weeks they track down a mysterious fugitive and along the way encounter an America where human rights are in peril. They must learn how the nation has dealt with certain issues in the past to make tough and thoughtful decisions about the future of civil rights and democracy. How, for instance, did reformer Jane Addams crusade against “white slavery” – i.e. human trafficking – in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? [A public event at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum](#) in Chicago explored Addams's role in the movement as well as what contemporary social services agencies are doing to stop the practice today.

“So many alternate-reality games are about marketing or selling something, but America 2049 is trying to do something good. That, to me, is really big—and the reason I've stuck with it,” says seasoned gamer and America 2049 player Nick Griffin, 30, a facilities coordinator in Inverness, AL, who says he was thrilled to find out about the tours connected to the game at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, where he had never been and where he could continue to engage with the issues and history referenced in the game. “You can read about the civil rights movement in a book, or see it in a movie, but interacting with the exhibits and timelines and artifacts that bring it to life is a whole different thing. Within ten minutes, I was choking back tears.”

“Our sites continue to expand the definition of what a ‘history museum’ program looks like,” says Elizabeth Silkes, executive director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which partnered with Breakthrough on this project. “The wonderful thing about this project is that it allows both gamers and human rights activists - who may not have considered museums as places to address present-day issues - to experience for themselves the power of the past in shaping the future.”

Sites of Conscience are historic sites and museums that consciously create new and innovative avenues for people to draw connections between the past and the issues we face today, such as immigration reform. Nine US [Sites of Conscience](#) will host events coinciding with the themes players encounter in America 2049 (one per week until the end of June). Events have already taken place at [Jane Addams Hull-House Museum](#) (Chicago); the [Lower East Side Tenement Museum](#) (New York); [United States Immigration Station, Angel Island](#) (San Francisco); and the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#) (Birmingham, AL).

Upcoming events will take place at [Bosque Redondo Memorial](#) (Fort Sumner, NM), [Levine Museum of the New South](#) (Charlotte), [Skirball Cultural Center](#) (Los Angeles), the [Arab American National Museum](#) (Dearborne, MI), and [Ellis Island Immigration Museum](#) (New York).

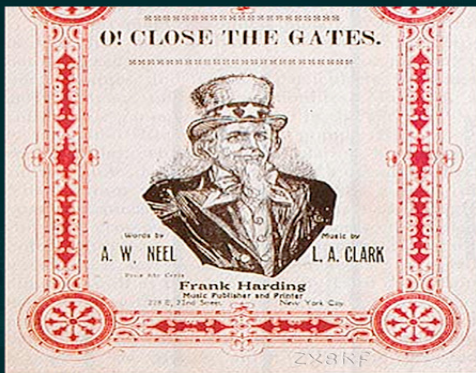
America 2049 has proven immensely successful, with over 20,000 players and nominations for both a Games for Change Award and a Katerva Award.

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## About the Coalition

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a worldwide network of “Sites of Conscience” – historic sites dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies. Sites of Conscience, like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in the United States, the Gulag Museum in Russia, and the District Six Museum in South Africa, foster public dialogue on social issues to build lasting cultures of human rights. The Coalition provides member sites with direct funding for civic engagement programs; organizes learning exchanges ranging from one-on-one collaborations to international conferences; and conducts strategic advocacy for sites and the Sites of Conscience movement. Currently, the Coalition is led by 17 Accredited Sites of Conscience and includes more than 260 members in 47 countries and a communications network of almost 2500 from 75 countries. For membership and further information, visit [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org).

### O! CLOSE THE GATES SONGBOOK



There was a successful effort to demonize immigrants in popular culture in the 1920s. Many of the songs in this book have become popular again in the years since the Nambian Plague, as popular sentiment turned against allowing immigration.

### INSPECTING A MEXICAN FREIGHT TRAIN, 1938



In the 1930s, the U.S. government deported Mexicans who were suspected of being in the country illegally – and wound up deporting many American citizens, too. Checks of freight trains became routine as workers struggled to return to their lives and families. Today, all border crossings and transit hubs are monitored by automatic systems checking SMRTTid and arresting anyone without a valid chip.

### CUBAN CIGAR ROLLERS



These cigar rollers left Cuba following the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro. This photograph was taken at a heritage festival in 1977. Such ethnic festivals are currently outlawed in 23 states because they promote dissent and unnecessarily emphasize differences between populations.

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