
Black Spatial Humanities: Theories, Methods, and Praxis in Digital Humanities (A Follow-up NEH ODH Summer Institute Panel)

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Introductory / Framing Remarks

Dr. David J. Kim

Dr. Kim Gallon's essay, "Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities," in the most recent Debates series volume argues for the continued development of a "relationship between the digital humanities and Africana/African American/Black studies ... so as to highlight how technology, employed in this underexamined context, can further expose humanity as a racialized social construction" (Gallon 2016: 42). With the recent proliferation of projects including Black Gotham, Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760-1761, Freedom on the Move, and T-RACES an emerging focus on the role that geospatial technologies can have in engaging with the history of race across the African

Diaspora has become an important area of digital scholarship. This hybrid 90-minute panel is a timely follow-up to a summer 2016 NEH ODH Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities, "[Space and Place in Africana/Black Studies: An Institute on Spatial Humanities Theories, Methods and Practice for Africana Studies](#)". The panel includes Institute faculty in a broad discussion regarding rigorous, community-based, and applied methodologies that now constitute a focus on race in the spatial humanities. Panelists will limit their presentation to no more than 10 minutes followed by a 30 minute Q&A working session to discuss the broad parameters of the sub-field and future scholarly approaches.

Spatial humanities has transformed the work of researchers, enabling profound considerations of space in relationship to human behavior and culture across time and place. Art history, literature, history, philosophy and religion – all notable fields from across the humanities – have benefited from scientific and quantitatively oriented technologies and tools to better understand the intersections between space and the human condition. It is particularly timely now to question space in relation to African-descended people's ability to traverse and negotiate spaces in western societies. The history of the Black body and American public and private space is particularly problematical as the presence of the Black body there has been largely unwanted during long stretches of American history. Indeed, both geographical and social spatial differentiation in the United States and the larger western world has largely been predicated on racial difference, exclusion and segregation. Leading proponents of this emerging sub-field, Gallon and Nieves, are slated to co-edit a new digital book series with the University of Georgia Press. Black spatial humanities is a sub-field of the spatial humanities that – in light of the fluidity of space in relation to people of African descent in the United States, Africa and the African Diaspora – studies the children of the Diaspora across specific places and times within an epistemological framework that is predicated on an ethic of anti-racism and liberation.

The panel will highlight some of the most innovative scholarship in both analog and digital formats that rely, in part, on new technology and forms of digital scholarly publication.

The panel will address the following questions:

- How do the spatial humanities and Africana/Black Studies work together to posit and practice a different way of knowing and imagining the world?

- How do racial identities impose a certain framework on our understanding of space?
- How can the spatial humanities help us experience the lived realities of Black/Brown bodies?
- How do maps/mapping technologies reflect and/or counter the realities (the dynamism) of Black life?
- How can spatial technologies provide us with a way of understanding the forms of inhumanity attributed to or placed upon Black/Brown people?

Modeling the Nineteenth-Century Colored Conventions Movement

Dr. David J. Kim

Throughout the nineteenth century, free and fugitive blacks across the US organized more than 150 state and national Colored Conventions. Less prominent than the contemporaneous abolitionist movement in US History writ large, the Colored Conventions movement represents a complex network of black political and religious leaders, intellectuals and entrepreneurs dedicated to the cause of racial justice in education, labor, citizenship and international human rights. As an introductory case study for the panel, this presentation will discuss the Colored Conventions Project (P. Gabrielle Foreman, faculty director) and its various digital and collaborative layers of archives building. Reflecting on its initial stages, as well as looking forward to the next phase of development, it will discuss the challenges of "modeling," as a digital humanities' methodological framing, both the interpretative and the community-building possibilities of this archive: from the discovery of documents to the design of the forthcoming database.



Figure 1. Sample Map, Conventions by City, Colored Conventions Project

Virtual Harlem 4.0: Experiencing the Humanities through Virtual and Augmented Realities

Dr. Bryan Carter

As technology continues to evolve at a blistering pace, digital humanists strive to incorporate ways in which these new tools for research, data visualization, haptics and mobile technologies fit into our own work. Of the many exciting tech developments, augmented reality and virtual reality are poised to make a significant impact on the way we teach, research and experience the humanities. This talk will focus on new developments within the Virtual Harlem Project to include motion and facial capture, data visualization and four-dimensional (4D) learning experiences.



Figure 2. 3D Model, Cotton Club, Virtual Harlem 4.0

The Spatial and Digital Dimensions of the History of the Black Press

Dr. Kim Gallon

In geopolitical terms, Africana Studies scholars have studied everyday mobilities, which include the flow of people, objects and ideas backward and forward across the Atlantic Ocean. Black people's ability to move across time and space is a cornerstone for understanding their social condition. Thus, numerous scholars have documented and theorized the integral connections between black mobility and citizenship, freedom and resistance. This paper moves beyond geospatial dimensions to critically assess and examine literal spaces occupied by ideas and identities in the black press. At the same time, the use of digitized newspapers shows how black news as space can be mapped onto broader concepts concerning black people's struggle to make their humanity manifest, as well as to think critically about the various digital topographies of historical black newspapers.

Enslaved Women's Narratives in Eastern Virginia: Intersectional Approaches in GIS

Dr. Scott Nesbit

Much work in the spatial humanities depends upon the abstraction and reduction of historical processes, events, and, most problematically, actors, into data points, perhaps visualized as simple dots on a map. Scholars including Johanna Drucker and Miriam Posner have argued for more nuanced, humanities-based approaches to data visualization. Yet, if we reject inherited data visualization tools and statistics-based approaches, scholars may find at least some helpful analytical possibilities foreclosed. This talk will explore the tension at the heart of humanities data visualization in a black studies context by examining one particular question within the history of slavery and emancipation: who was escaping into United States lines during the American Civil War? The paper will argue for GIS-based approaches that are sensitive to the intersectional identities and the actions of formerly enslaved women in eastern Virginia by examining runaway slave advertisements.

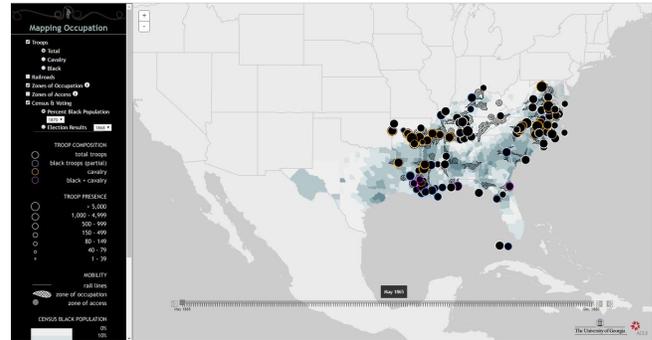


Figure 3. Emancipating Slavery Interface, University of Richmond

3D Forensics & Historical Reconstructions: Documenting Human Rights Violations During the 1976 Soweto Uprisings

Dr. Angel David Nieves

Over the past decade, scholars and community leaders have experimented with the use of new digital technologies to tell the history of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Technologies now at our disposal allow us to layer victim testimony in hypertexts using multiple tools for mapping, text mining, and 3D visualizations. Digital humanities (DH) may also help analyze documentation so as to reconstruct and recover an alternative historical narrative in the face of conventional wisdom or officializing histories for the foreign tourist market. The potential layering of the many narratives also helps lay bare the messiness of archive making, the methodologies of digital ethnography, and, in particular, the endangered nature of those archives across South Africa related to the Soweto Uprisings of June 1976. As a 3D and virtual reality enabled platform (built atop the Unity engine), the Social Justice History Platform is able to represent both 2D geospatial information (such as maps, photographs, and records) and 3D representations of landscapes, locations, and 3D models of historical buildings and objects. The project combines traditional ethnographic and oral history fieldwork with 3D technologies in the pursuit of documenting past human rights violations by the former apartheid regime.



Figure 4. Social Justice History Platform Interface, Soweto Historical GIS Project.

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