

Instructor/DH Fellow: Aims McGuinness

Class Number/Name: History 193: Mapping Worlds

Digital Humanities Tools/Methods: StoryMapJS, UWM Libraries Digital Collections

Assignment Name: Digital Mappamundi

Description of Assignment:

Students created a digital storymap that visualized their path across time and space from childhood through graduation from UWM and beyond. The assignment gave students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of key concepts from the history of cartography as well as their ability to use the digital tool known as “StoryMapJS.” Students also learned to navigate and make use of the resources of UWM Libraries Digital Collections and UWM’s American Geographical Society Library (AGSL). The overarching goal of the assignment was to help first-year students align and integrate their pre-college dreams, their choice of major, and their post-college aspirations. I reasoned that students might be more likely to find meaning and purpose in their college experience if they could clearly visualize and narrate how college represents both a culmination of their earlier education and a springboard for their dreams for the future, for their career and otherwise.

Throughout the course, students considered how maps use symbols, the organization of space, narrative, and other strategies to visualize abstract concepts and serve specific goals or agendas. Among the types of maps that we studied was the medieval *mappamundi*. *Mappaemundi* such as the AGSL’s own Leardo (1452) were created to help Christians visualize their path to salvation and situate themselves in Christian cosmology. They often featured a three-part spatial narrative that started in the East with the Terrestrial Paradise or Garden of Eden (Act 1) then proceeded to Jerusalem (Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection in Act 2) and culminated in the West with Judgement Day (Act 3).

Using *mappaemundi* as models, students created digital storymaps that visualized a path not to salvation but to college graduation and beyond. First, students made a storymap using StoryMapJS with 9 different sites: 3 that were important to their past (Act 1), 3 that were important to their present at UWM (Act 2), and 3 that they hoped would be of importance to them in the future (Act 3). Next, they used the search engine of UWM Libraries Digital Collections to pair each of their 9 sites with a relevant digitized map from the AGSL. In the text box for each map/site, students wrote an analysis of the map in which they demonstrated their knowledge of concepts such as projection, cartouche, scale, and politics of importance. The final result was what I describe as a digital mappamundi: a storymap divided into three different geographical and temporal categories: childhood (Act 1), college at UWM (Act 2), and post-graduation realization of students’ dreams and aspirations (Act 3).

Examples:

- <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/a3504ac2cc0d87fea7d89697eea01ea1/history193parkway/index.html>
- <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/56ce37d2a34f116fae12656429a45e74/history193prospect/index.html>
- <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/9cbf36d1e669f140f2f4c2fa480d8a5e/history-193-story-map/index.html>