The Spatial Relationship Between Labor, Cultural Migration, and the Development of Folk Music in the American South: A Digital Visualization Project

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THE SPATIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LABOR, CULTURAL MIGRATION, AND
THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOLK MUSIC IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: A DIGITAL
VISUALIZATION PROJECT

by

ROBERT L. CLARKE
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2014
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ABSTRACT

This Digital/Public History visualization thesis project explores how three factors—Atlantic migration patterns, demographics, and socio-economic systems—influenced the development of folk music in the southern United States from the 18th century through the 20th century. A large body of written scholarship exists addressing plantation economies, the slave trade, and folk music. Digital technology, however, creates new opportunities for analyzing the geo-temporal aspects contained within the numerous archival resources such as census and migration records, field recordings, economic data, diaries, and other personal records. The written portion of the thesis addresses the historiography, research findings, and the process of creating the visualization product. The digital component employs open-source archives and MapScholar, a visualization tool developed at the University of Virginia, to reveal the spatial dimensions of three distinct regions—The greater Chesapeake (Virginia/North Carolina/), the coastal lowlands and sea islands of the Gullah Corridor (Charleston/Savannah), and Louisiana (New Orleans). The end result is an educational and potential research tool that affords viewers a more dynamic perspective on the relationship between agricultural slave labor, migration patterns, and folk music than is possible with text alone.
For Vickie
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any Master’s thesis is a culmination of years of study, research, and hard work. I am blessed to have the guidance of some extremely dedicated individuals, without whose expertise this project would not have been possible. When I decided to return to academic life after many years to pursue a graduate degree, I was fortunate to have met Professor Carl Creasman at Valencia College, whose leadership in the classroom continues to inspire me. While at UCF, my professors were always there to not only teach, but also act as a sounding board for ideas, and to offer critical advice. It is much appreciated.

I owe a special acknowledgment to my committee members, Drs. Ezekiel Walker, Luis Martínez-Fernández, and Scot French. Dr. Walker taught me how to become a better writer and is one of the kindest people I have ever met. Dr. Martínez-Fernández shared his vast knowledge of Caribbean history, music, and culture and I greatly enjoy our conversations on education and photography. I also want to thank my committee chair, Dr. French, for all his mentorship throughout my digital humanities career and guidance while navigating the “promises and perils” of creating a digital history project.

A number of individuals outside of UCF provided key assistance. Among them were Aaron Spelbring, Archivist at the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston, South Carolina and Grace Morris Cordial, Historical Resources Coordinator at the Beaufort County Library. Both offered hours of help, providing boxes of records pertaining to Gullah history and allowing me to make digital copies. A special thanks goes to Bill Ferster and Max Edelson from the University of Virginia for their guidance while creating the MapScholar site. Bill generously
carved time out of his busy schedule for numerous Google Hangout and Skype calls and
provided valuable feedback.

I also wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to my family for all their love and guidance. My stepson, Freddie, and stepdaughter, Corrine, offered countless words of encouragement. My sisters, Courtney and Hollis, listened to me rant through my successes and struggles, and my mother, Sandy, has always shown unconditional love and support for my endeavors. My father, Robert, who sadly passed away just weeks before my thesis defense, instilled the values of hard work and service in his family and we are eternally grateful. Finally, to my dear wife, Vickie, who endured reading every paper I have written, every sleepless night I spent studying, and whose love and support inspire me to become a better person, I love you.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis project is to provide fresh perspective regarding the development of folk music in American South using digital technology. I chose the Chesapeake, Gullah, and New Orleans areas because each represents a point where various migration patterns and cultural traditions intersected. The folk music that developed in each one featured distinct characteristics, in part due to economic systems that influenced demographic patterns. In the tobacco-growing region of the Chesapeake area, for instance, the slave population experienced a natural growth rate sooner than in the harsher rice and sugar producing locales.\(^1\) This in turn led to changes in forced migration patterns. Over time, the blending of Scots-Irish fiddle and African banjo musical traditions produced a mix of folk tunes played by black musicians and adopted by whites during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the twentieth century, musicians incorporated instruments originally brought to the Americas by the Spanish to form bluegrass music. The lowland coastal areas and sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia, known as the Gullah Corridor, saw a different pattern emerge as white masters imported Africans with specific knowledge of rice cultivation. Living in relative isolation on large rice plantations, slaves developed a body of labor songs, spirituals, “shouts,” and dances. Many cultural survivals retained during the Middle Passage still resonate in the region today. In New Orleans, where sugar became the dominant agricultural commodity, French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean traditions blended to form the unique zydeco and later Jazz traditions. Higher slave mortality rates than in the Chesapeake or Carolinas led to a constant influx of new arrivals from the

Caribbean and Africa. The “intimacy of the races,” as John Blassingame put it, produced a folk culture that reflected more Caribbean influence than in other Southern areas.²

These trends, while well documented in books and journals, have yet to be presented together in an interactive visualization. Such a project will offer a new perspective on cultural development and allow the viewer to interact directly with primary source material. As the ever-emerging field of Digital Humanities gains increasing acceptance within academia, developers are creating a wide variety of tools to help scholars access archived resources and visualize historical arguments over time and space. Recent articles by the National Council on Public History and the American Historical Association reveal the growing number of software packages specifically designed for the digital historian.³ Technology conferences such as THAT Camp (The Humanities and Technology Camp) bring computer programmers, historians, archivists, and collaborators together to discuss ideas and envision new ways to communicate outside traditional texts.⁴ As a result, scholars have many archiving and mapping tools from which to choose, including Omeka (in conjunction with the Neatline mapping plugin), Arc Explorer, ArcGIS, Google Maps, Map Hub, and GeoCommons, among many others.⁵

At the outset of this project, the goal was to build a digital archive of primary source material within the Omeka platform, then extract the geo-temporal data using the Neatline mapping plugin, thus creating a visualization that showed the relationship between plantation

⁴ http://thatcamp.org/about/ (accessed September 29, 2013)
economies and the culture that formed as a result. Past experience with Omeka suggested this as a viable option for the end product. As the work progressed, however, it became apparent that while Omeka is an outstanding industry-standard archive tool used by many universities and museum professionals for creating repositories, its primary strength lies in the archival features. The program also requires a level of institutional support outside the scope of this endeavor. After researching alternatives, the University of Virginia’s new MapScholar platform emerged as a more effective solution.

MapScholar is a collaborative effort of the SHANTI (Sciences, Humanities, and Arts Network of Technological Initiatives) Project at the University of Virginia. Developed by Max Edelson and Bill Ferster, the tool acts as a gateway that brings together primary source material residing in separate digital archives on the World Wide Web using a spreadsheet, such as Google Docs. Scholars can create a collection and then present it in an interactive visualization. This “loose collection of parts,” as Ferster puts it, addresses the institutional support issue of a full software program such as Omeka. MapScholar resides in the Cloud and runs in any web browser without the need for special programming. The Methodology chapter of this paper features a full discussion of this framework while the Results chapter provides screenshots of the completed digital project, along with explanations of the functionality.
Before one can discuss labor and its relationship to the development of folk music, it is important to understand the forces that brought various cultures together in the Americas and the major themes in the scholarship. The major debate in the historiography of African Diaspora began during the middle of the twentieth century and still reverberates today. The core question scholars grappled with was whether or not the slave trade completely stripped displaced Africans of their cultural forms, or if not, to what degree were they able to retain any continuity of their African past during enslavement and eventual emancipation.

At the heart of the controversy were two American scholars, Melville J. Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier. Herskovits was an anthropologist who began his research during the 1920s at a time when pseudo-scientific racism, eugenics, and notions of white supremacy were at a peak. His early work sought to discredit the work of those who used cranial measurements and physical attributes to create a racial hierarchy based on biological classifications. Using the same methods as the “scientists,” Herskovits noted that black and mulatto subjects shared many of the same physical traits, thus it was impossible to clearly categorize a person as belonging to a distinct biological race. He argued that African-Americans were in reality a mixed population group made up of varying degrees of black, white, and Indian backgrounds. Instead of race, Herskovits stressed that what truly defined a person was cultural identity and environment, not

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genetics. He spent the rest of his career studying African and African-American cultures and their influence in the Americas.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1941, Herskovits published his seminal work The Myth of the Negro Past, where he argued there was an enduring African influence on African-American culture. According to Herskovits, the erroneous view held by whites claimed that black Americans had no distinct past and thus fueled racial prejudice. This myth consisted of several key components. First, whites viewed the Negro as a childlike character that easily adapted to unsatisfactory social situations and happily accepted them. Second, only the inferior Africans were enslaved, while the more intelligent ones evaded capture. Third, since tribal and language connections were severed during enslavement, there was no possibility that new forms of communication could have formed. Lastly, even if slaves were able to retain some of their “savage and low” customs, whites believed that exposure to European ways would, and did, cause them to yearn for and adopt their master’s culture. Thus, in the white man’s view, the Negro had no “real” past and should welcome Western white ways.\textsuperscript{8}

Herskovits rejected these assumptions. He argued that the process of acculturation contained three components—\textit{retention} (or survivals), \textit{syncretism}, and \textit{reinterpretation}. Retention referred to those elements of African culture that survived the Middle Passage. During his field research in West Africa, the Caribbean islands, and North America, Herskovits noted the similarities of language characteristics, music, religious practices, family structure, and folk customs, notably in the Gullah region of the South Carolina/Georgia lowlands. This phenomenon\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{7} Jerry Gershenhorn, \textit{Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge} (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 4.
formulated his view that many “Africanisms” indeed survived the transatlantic journey. Once in the Americas, *syncretism* blended African traditions with new elements from the New World. *Reinterpretation* occurred when these hybrid customs underwent adaptation and evolution to suit the needs of successive generations. It also referred to the process by which Africans could take European customs and redefine them in terms of their African worldview.9 Religion and music were two key areas where this occurred and subjects that later historians studied in-depth.

E. Franklin Frazier acknowledged that evidence of Herskovits’s theory could be found outside the United States in places such as the West Indies and parts of South America, where cultural practices still reflected African roots. Nevertheless, he argued that in the United States, “African traditions and practices did not take root and survive.” Frazier believed that any memories of Africa were quickly forgotten during enslavement and any traditions that did remain, only did so during the first generation. As evidence, he pointed to twentieth-century black society in the United States, stating, “as regards the Negro family, there is no reliable evidence that African culture has had any influence on its development.”10 Yet in his footnotes, he admits that within the Sea Islands (Gullah), that “we probably have ‘in the Praise House’ a fusion of African traits of culture with the practices of Western civilization.”11

Lorenzo Dow Turner made the case for this connection with his groundbreaking book, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, published in 1949. Turner’s work not only laid the foundation for subsequent scholarship of the Gullah region, it had far reaching implications for understanding other creole cultures throughout the Caribbean and Americas. Hailed as the first

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11 Ibid., 9.
professionally trained African-American linguist, Turner conducted research on the Sea Islands in 1932 and 1933 as part of the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* project. He interviewed native Gullah speakers from several islands collecting recordings of stories, songs, and testimony.\(^{12}\)

After analyzing his data, Turner questioned the prevailing thinking that the Gullah language was nothing more than a “low version” of English learned from indentured servants and slave masters. He began studying African languages and comparing them with other creole languages in Jamaica, Haiti, Louisiana, and South America, finding similarities in each one with direct African roots. Turner concluded that, in fact, the Gullah language contained far deeper African origins than previously thought. He identified over four thousand words with ties to West African languages of the Twi, Dahomeans, Mandingo, Yoruba, Ibo, Ovimbunu, and the northern tribes of Nigeria. The majority were words used in conversation and personal names, while others were primarily found in songs, stories, and prayers.\(^{13}\)

Turner’s work had significant impact within the academic community. He provided the first solid evidence of African linguistic survivals, debunking several widely held myths about Gullah culture and, along with Melville J. Herskovits, inspired a more Afrocentric approach to African-American studies.\(^{14}\) Prior to Turner’s *Africanisms*, common myths regarded the Gullah language as little more than an uneducated mixing of poor English with a few African words.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 31.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid., xxv.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 5.
Turner heavily criticized his contemporaries who provided analysis of Gullah without studying African languages at all. He cited Columbia University’s George Phillip Krapp’s insistence that “not a single detail of Negro pronunciation or syntax can be proved to have any other than an English origin.” Other writers considered the Gullahs “slovenly and careless of speech,” or argued that since the slaves were illiterate, masters had to resort to a form of “baby talk,” which formed the basis of the creole language. Turner debunks A.E. Gonzales’s assertion that “the words, of course, are not African, for the African brought over or retained only a few words from his jungle-tongue, and even these few are by no means authenticated…” Had these scholars compared Gullah with West African languages, perhaps they might have seen more similarities.

Not only did Turner’s book reveal the inaccuracy and shallowness of these derogatory assessments, it stands as reference manual for those who study Gullah culture today. Roughly forty-five pages of *Africanisms* provide Turner’s analysis. The rest of the nearly three hundred pages list the translated words, texts, and songs he collected.

French anthropologist Roger Bastide also wrote many volumes during the post-war period including his 1971 work, *African Civilizations in the New World*. Bastide’s research built upon Herskovits’s theories, yet he also acknowledged Frazier’s counter-argument that slavery had wiped out many remnants of African culture in some communities. He defined two core communities at opposite ends of the African-American spectrum—the African Society and the Negro Society, each with its own customs, folklore, and religious interpretations.

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According to Bastide, the African societies were those where old traditions were retained in spite of the pressures of the new environment. Examples could be found in the Maroon communities of Jamaica, Haiti, parts of Cuba, and South America. Because of the large numbers of Africans relative to white masters, the slave culture in the Caribbean was able to maintain many of the African survivals and adapt them to their new reality. One could argue this happened in the Gullah Corridor as well. By contrast, Bastide distinguished Negro society as one that succumbed to the pressure of the slave environment and experienced a collective memory loss. In addition to extreme disenfranchisement, racial segregation put these enclaves into isolation and at the mercy of a much larger white population. As a result, this group was forced to “invent new forms of social life in response to isolation, their type of work, and new requirements.” Bastide believed this was more evident in the United States, lending credence to Frazier’s argument that black Americans had been stripped of their African cultural roots. He did acknowledge, however, that a broad spectrum existed between these two extremes along with a varying degree of “creolization.”

Bastide also defined three “layers” of folklore among these groups. The first was the pure, traditional African folklore that included dances, stories, songs, even voodoo, all of which were transmitted from Africa on slave ships and had survived in the Americas. The second was Negro folklore, which developed spontaneously in the context of the New World. This layer melded European elements, at times forced by white masters, with older African traditions. They were then reinterpreted into a new form and adapted to the cultural environment. The third aspect was

19 Bastide, African Civilizations in the New World, 43.
a white folklore, something Bastide argued some blacks absorbed in order to drive assimilation or create better working conditions during enslavement.\footnote{Roger Bastide, \textit{African Civilisations in the New World} (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 171,179,181.}

In 1976, shortly after Bastide’s work, anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price published \textit{An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective}, the first of two essays examining Creole culture in the Caribbean and the birth of African-American culture. Although somewhat rooted in the Herskovits model, Mintz and Price sought to refine the theories of earlier scholars and present a more nuanced picture of African-American culture in light of new developments in African Studies. They argued that in order to understand African-American or Creole culture, one must first examine the conditions that brought the European and African populations in contact with each other and how the migrations of enslaved Africans occurred.\footnote{Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, \textit{An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective} (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1976), 43.}

While Herskovits asserted that the region of West Africa contained a more or less homogenous culture, Mintz and Price noted that by the mid-1970s, historians and anthropologists had discovered that West Africa was actually more culturally diverse than earlier scholars believed. The numerous tribes may have shared similar perspectives on the universe or supernatural principles, but their responses varied to the point where one could not identify a widespread “culture” in the Western sense of the word; that is a “body of shared beliefs and values among an organized group.”\footnote{Ibid., 5} Where Mintz and Price did agree with Herskovits was that during the shared experience of enslavement, similar principles enabled the diverse population to formulate a creole culture based on the various African elements transferred from the Old World.
Language was another important cultural aspect that Mintz and Price examined. They stressed that while Europeans of the same language groups and cultures migrated en masse to various regions in the New World, African slaves did not share a common language among themselves since they originated from many diverse groups. Mintz and Price contended that since the slaves did not have a “continuing speech community, the distinct languages eventually fell into disuse and were supplanted by a mix of European, African, and Native American dialects” commonly referred to as pidgin. Subsequent generations grew up hearing pidgin and gradually expanded the vocabulary until it became the native language, at which time it became Creole.” They argued that a similar process occurred with other cultural aspects such as religion, music, and folklore.

John W. Blassingame shared this belief in his 1979 edition of The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South. His work examined the life experiences of the plantation slaves and builds upon many of the ideas put forth by Herskovits, Bastide, and Mintz and Price. Yet, he stressed that for most of the historiography concerning the Antebellum South, scholars had focused the vast majority of their research on the planters and the Southern way of life. Up to that point, the slave’s experience had not been the subject of serious scholarship. Contrary to popular belief, Blassingame asserted, slaves spent much of their time “free from direct surveillance by whites, controlled important aspects of their lives, and had relative freedom of thought.” He argued this allowed the slaves to create a culture of their own that has

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“contributed to American life and thought.”25 Blassingame used slave narratives, autobiographies, planter memoirs, and travelers’ accounts to provide a glimpse into the slaves’ social system. Among the many African survivals Blassingame identified, two key areas of his research were religion and music, aspects of slave culture that were intimately linked. By making their own cultural forms such as folktales, songs, spirituals, and dances that were distinct from those of their master’s traditions, slaves were able to achieve a certain degree of personal autonomy and self-identity.26 Blassingame’s work is also valuable for the many musical verses and dance rituals that he outlines based upon the slaves’ own words and the travelers’ accounts he studied.

Writing during the same period as Blassingame, in 1980 Ira Berlin published, “Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America,” in the American Historical Review. Berlin argued that vastly different conditions in the colonies produced three distinct slave systems—the Northern (New England), the Chesapeake, and the South Carolina/Georgia lowlands. According to Berlin, previous scholarship did not fully explore the concepts of time and space within these societies, but rather treated them as static environments. He stressed that each region had different crops, labor needs, and demographics that influenced how the slave community developed in each area over time.27

Berlin observed that in the Northern colonies, the black population initially became divided between those who labored on small rural farms and those who lived in urban

25 Blassingame, The Slave Community, xii.
26 Ibid., 105.
environments as house servants and maritime workers. Some eventually became property owners and developed stable family relationships. In many cases, blacks and whites worked in close proximity to each other, resulting in more cultural parallels than in the other regions and, over time, creolization produced a unified Afro-American population. This contrasted with the Southern plantation system that developed in Gullah region of lowland South Carolina and Georgia.

According to Berlin, spatial dynamics became an influential factor in the way black society developed in the South. In the Gullah region, the mass of slaves labored in the rice and indigo fields, physically removed from their white masters, many of whom oversaw their plantations from the comfort of Charleston, Savannah, and Beaufort, among other places. Since African knowledge of rice production was crucial to economic development, most plantation owners sought to import slaves only from the West African rice cultivating regions. These slaves maintained many of their African cultural traits due to their relative isolation from whites once on the rice plantations. Berlin notes that space also played a key role in the development urban black communities, but with the opposite effect. Their close proximity to whites, intermarriage, and business relationships created a creole culture vastly different than their plantation counterparts.

In the Chesapeake, where tobacco eventually became the staple crop, Berlin sees time as the determining factor in the formation of Afro-American culture. Africans came to the area early on and eventually became a self-sustaining population by the time plantation society

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29 Ibid., 61, 62.
developed. He argues this reduced African imports and the cultural divide between Africans and creoles eventually disappeared, leaving a single, unified Afro-American culture in the region.30

Berlin further explored the relationship between plantation economies and slave societies in the 1993 work, *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, a collection of essays he edited with Philip D. Morgan. The book expands the analysis of Berlin’s earlier work to include sections on Louisiana, Georgia, and the Caribbean. The various authors examine coffee, sugar, cotton, tobacco, and rice production and demonstrate the direct connection between the types of work the slaves engaged in and the cultural characteristics developed in each society. Aspects include gender roles, family life, music, religion, and private economies as well as the master-slave relationship in each system.31

The evidence is clear that Africans brought a varying degree of cultural elements with them during the Middle Passage. The degree to which these “Africanisms” were able to survive and transform, however, varies depending on the region in question. Berlin and Morgan maintain that in the United States, the sugar producing Gulf Coast was the most demanding labor system, with high mortality rates and low familial ties. South Carolina’s rice economy was slightly less harsh, and the tobacco producing Chesapeake was considerably less lethal, with eventual natural population increase and a stronger sense of community. They argue that the nature of slave life,

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30 Ibid., 68.
including music and folk traditions, can be linked to the various forms of commodity production.32

John Thornton’s *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* gives perhaps the most balanced analysis of the Atlantic slave trade. He argues that Africans were not simply passive victims of the slave trade, but active participants on both sides of the ocean, particularly where cultural transformation is concerned. Thornton concludes that slaves adapted to their new circumstances and surroundings, gradually creating new traditions by blending old with new. He also maintains that contrary to some nationalist scholars’ arguments, in some cases, Africans freely adopted some European ways while in Africa without coercion if those ways fit within their worldview. Christianity was one example of this phenomenon. Both Christianity and African religions had multiple spirits (gods and saints), their religious leaders received “revelations” from these beings, and both had a certain level of mysticism attached to them. When Africans were exposed to Christianity, it blended with their beliefs. That synthesis of new and old cultures continued in the Americas.33

Thornton stressed that the rate of transformation varied, based on the type of cultural aspect in question. Language, kinship structure, and social structure were areas he identified as being relatively stable. Even when thrown into new environments, change occurred gradually because these traits were rooted in complex shared systems. He observed that other cultural traits, such as art, music, dance, and cooking are more likely to undergo a faster transformation when


exposed to the “aesthetic” aspects of another culture because one does not have to live within the system to appreciate them.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{The Gullah-Geechee Corridor}

The Gullah-Geechee Corridor refers to a roughly thirty mile wide coastal region of the United States that runs approximately from Wilmington, North Carolina southward to Jacksonville, Florida. In recent years, the Gullah region has increasingly attracted tourists, businesses, and scholars, all wanting to celebrate (and some argue exploit) this unique cultural landscape.\textsuperscript{35} Because much of the population lived on the coastal Sea Islands, traditions handed down from generation to generation remained relatively unchanged until the 1930s, when bridges and new roads began bringing tourists and development. Much like the Appalachian Mountain region, poverty was typical and outsiders often considered the Gullah dialect and customs as a badge of shame rather than a source of pride. As in the mountains, anthropologists, folklorists, and ethnomusicologists became the first scholars to recognize the cultural significance of the Gullah Corridor and begin documenting it.

\textsuperscript{34} John K. Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800}, 208.
\textsuperscript{35} Marquetta L. Goodwine, ed., \textit{The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture} (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, Inc., 1998), 9, 201. Goodwine cautions that some outsiders choose to treat Gullahs as “specimens” rather than an active, fluid cultural community with rich traditions. She argues that the community must play an active role in preservation and study, otherwise researchers border on exploitation. She states, “We are tired of having to defend ourselves concerning the supposed analysis of Gullah culture that has been and is still being promoted within academic arenas by people that have no connection to our community other than having come in for a few days, weeks or months to do research and to “study” us. She welcomes those who come to help and give something back to the community in exchange for academic pursuits.
Lydia Parrish was one such person. Born into a New Jersey Quaker community in 1871, Parrish grew up hearing the descendants of runaway slaves sing the old songs. While visiting the Georgia Sea Islands in 1909, she heard some of these same pieces performed and decided to collect and preserve as many as possible. Parrish moved to St. Simon’s island and eventually gained the trust of the local African-American community. Her work brought her into contact with Lorenzo Dow Turner, who was researching the Gullah language. Turner helped Parrish transcribe the collection of spirituals, work songs, and ring shouts, later published as *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* in 1942. The book has been reprinted many times since then. 36

While Parrish produced a valuable collection and resource, she lacked formal training and held a paternalistic view of the Gullah people, claiming that the “ultimate future of this music lies with the Plantation owners and those who mold public taste.” She believed the best way to preserve the music was for white planters to organize “barbeques” that would “bring out the best talent.” 37 Yet, while folklorists today strive to give their subjects more agency than Parrish allowed, her passion and determination to preserve the songs comes through in her writing and *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* remains a good reference of Gullah music.

In the 1950s, another musician and folklorist named Guy Carawan began visiting the Gullah region in an effort to preserve its cultural roots. Carawan and his wife, Candie, worked at the Highlander Folk School on John’s Island; developed to increase literacy and promote citizenship education. Carawan used music programs to foster pride in the unique Gullah heritage. Conducting oral histories, recording songs, and establishing music festivals, Carawan

37 Ibid., 14, 19.
amassed a valuable collection that showcases the history of the John’s Island community, while photographer Robert Yellin documented the process. In 1966, they published *Ain’t You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?*, documenting the lives and cultural history of the John’s Island community. 38 Both the Carawan and Yellin collections are now archived at the College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center, located in Charleston, South Carolina and were used in developing this thesis project. 39

During the 1970s scholarly interest in the Gullah Corridor increased as African-American Studies programs grew. Peter H. Wood’s 1974 work, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, was one of the first to study slavery from the slave’s perspective. Wood stressed that earlier scholarship tended to treat slavery as a “static institution” and dealt mainly with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when presenting African-American history. Wood’s goal was to explore the black experience in colonial South Carolina, limiting himself to pre-1739 resources. He overturned the previous assumption that slaves arrived as unskilled workers and argued that ‘the role of the black majority was active, not passive. Negro slaves played a significant and often determinative part in the evolution of the colony.” Through his research, Wood discovered that not only were slaves in lowland South Carolina sought for their knowledge of rice production, but also their ability to withstand malaria.

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38 Candie Carawan and Guy Carawan, *Ain’t You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?: People of John’s Island, South Carolina - Their Faces, Their Words and Their Songs* (Athens, GA: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994).

39 The Avery Research Center is located 125 Bull Street, Charleston, S.C. I spent two weeks during August of 2013 conducting research there as well as visiting John’s Island and St. Helena Island near Beaufort, S.C. to research the Praise Houses. The recordings were not digitized, but I was able to listen and read the transcriptions. I was able to digitize many of the Yellin photographs, and they appear in the MapScholar project along with maps and slave auction notices from the Walter Pantovic Collection.
(due to carrying the sickle-cell trait).\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Black Majority} became an important stepping-stone for further scholarly studies of the Gullah region.

Taking Wood’s research on rice production further, Daniel C. Littlefield published \textit{Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina} in 1981. As the title suggests, Littlefield sought to explore Wood’s assertion on a deeper level. He found that not only was there a preference for slaves with rice knowledge, but European colonists were more aware of the ethnic differences among Africans than previously thought.\textsuperscript{41} Littlefield felt this was a necessary concept for scholars to grasp as researching ethnicity could lead to further insights regarding the African side of slavery and cultural survivals, as opposed to considering Africa as a whole. More importantly, he concluded that his research overturned the myth that Africans “had nothing to offer but labor and rhythm.” His work proved that Africans contributed more technical expertise to the growth of the United States than past historians had given them credit.\textsuperscript{42}

Seeking to explore the personal aspect of the Gullah region’s slave communities, historian Charles Joyner began conducting oral histories of slave descendants in 1969 and continued research for almost a decade. In 1984, he published \textit{Down By the Riverside}, an in-depth study of the All Saint’s Parish area near Georgetown, South Carolina. Along with diaries, personal letters, plantation records, and census data, Joyner created a compelling picture of a particular slave society and gave voice to those who had become statistics in history books. One


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 176, 177.
of Joyner’s research goals was to find out the “how” and “why” of the transformation in slave folk life. Through the personal stories he reconstructed, Joyner validated the connection between the isolated plantation conditions and the ability for African traits to survive in the Gullah region.\textsuperscript{43} Through his work, we can see how individuals in this community connected to the broader subject of the slave trade and South Carolina’s plantation economy.

Daniel C. Littlefield’s assertion that researching ethnicity might yield a better understanding of cultural survivals was borne out in William S. Pollizter’s 1999 work, \textit{The Gullah People and Their African Heritage}. Pollizter documented the ethnic origins of the population and explored connections between Africa and Gullah. He examined aspects such as health care, belief systems, agriculture, language, and family structures to give a valuable survey of Gullah culture.

\textit{The Chesapeake Region}

The Chesapeake receives much attention in the aforementioned volumes on the Atlantic Slave Trade, particularly in the works of Ira Berlin. Allan Kulikoff’s \textit{Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800}, however, provides an in-depth analysis of the Chesapeake region and the relationship between tobacco and socio-economic development during the eighteen century.

In a stark comparison to Charles Joyner’s All Saint’s Parrish study, Kulikoff argues that in Virginia, “a large white population, declining proportions of Africans among slaves, conflicts between African and creole slaves, and small plantation sizes discouraged the formation of a separate African American culture for generations.” He echoed Ira Berlin’s observation that as a natural increase in the slave population occurred and larger plantations became the norm, eventually a unified Afro-American community developed within the context of a larger, white majority.

Kulikoff’s approach addresses the race, class, and gender aspects of the Chesapeake, giving equal time to white and black laborers. He demonstrates that the two races developed their social structures in close proximity and each had an impact on the other in almost every aspect of their lives.

For an overview of black folk music in the Chesapeake area, two volumes are worth noting. The first is Dena J. Epstein’s *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*. While not strictly confined to the this region, Epstein emphasizes the development of instrumentation as well as the spirituals, work songs, and dance music within the black community. She examines the origin of instrument terminology, especially for the banjo, and use of the fiddle, explaining how these two instruments adapted over time. Epstein also explores how black and white musical traditions intersected and the impact this had on each other’s music.

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44 Allan Kulikoff and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va), *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 345-46.
Cecilia Conway’s African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions provides another useful study of music acculturation. Conway focuses squarely on the banjo and its transformation from an African instrument to its adoption by white minstrels and later mountain musicians. However, she gives also gives attention to the Virginia connection and the various playing styles that developed over the region, by both black and white players.\(^47\)

**Louisiana**

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall argues that Africans maintained ethnic identities and cultural links between America and Africa and these bonds impacted particular regions in the United States. In *Slavery and African Ethnicities: Restoring the Links*, Hall asserts that documentary evidence proves that Africans were “clustered” into ethnic enclaves through trade relationships, slave owner preference, or simply ocean currents that linked certain African and American ports.\(^48\) While she sees validity in the Mintz-Price theory of creolization, she contends that the early arrivals dominated the process and newcomers had to adjust to the new culture. This goes against Roger Bastide’s opposite claim that the newcomers were the dominant force.\(^49\) Hall’s work *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* also examines creolization, but with a specific emphasis on Louisiana during the French and Spanish periods. She maintains that all newcomers, European and African, adapted and reinterpreted their cultural elements according to the environments they


\(^{49}\) Ibid, 168-169.
encountered.\textsuperscript{50} This process is still evident today with the many styles of Jazz and Caribbean inspired rhythms.

John Blassingame’s 1973 work \textit{Black New Orleans 1860-1880} analyzes the black social and economic life during Reconstruction and is a good companion piece to Hall’s work on Louisiana. Blassingame argues that New Orleans was a cosmopolitan city, with black and white cultures integrating more than other parts of the South during this period. This carried over to music, where Blassingame contends African-Americans influenced all other forms of music in the city.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{Digital Scholarship}

Digital History refers to the use of computer technology, the Internet, and software to represent the past in an electronic medium. These tools allow scholars to “create a framework through the technology,” giving audiences a chance to engage sources and historical narratives in a way that traditional books and exhibits alone cannot do.\textsuperscript{52} The goal of the digital historian reaches beyond simply digitizing analog records and texts. The real power of digital history is the ability to analyze primary source material from a different perspective and form relationships that may not be apparent in the written word or large analog archive. The results may reinforce, add to, or perhaps challenge the existing historiography of a given subject. Like traditional texts,

\textsuperscript{50} Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, \textit{Africans in Colonial Louisiana : The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), xiv.
\textsuperscript{51} Blassingame, \textit{Black New Orleans, 1860-1880}, 140.
a digital history project presents evidence and can formulate a narrative, yet the structure is such that by filtering the data in different combinations, alternative interpretations are also possible. From a Public History perspective, this is an exciting development. By sharing authority and allowing the audience direct access to primary source material, scholars give history consumers the opportunity to engage in the process of discovery and form their own conclusions.  

Compared to other academic disciplines, historians were relatively slow to incorporate digital tools into their scholarship for a variety of reasons. The proliferation of new history-based blogs and Internet hubs such as Wikipedia seemed to threaten the hegemony of the traditional gatekeepers of the historical record—the professional historians who produced scholarly monographs within academia. Some questioned the validity of these outlets, where anyone with a computer could post information as “fact.” Skeptics pointed to the abundance of questionable non-peer-reviewed “evidence” found on the Internet. For some traditional scholars, a lack of training and unfamiliarity with new technology made the rapidly developing digital realm seem daunting. This is gradually changing as improved technology makes it more feasible to create digital projects, universities become more interdisciplinary, and educators adapt to teach a generation of students who were “born digital.” Nevertheless, one of the central debates in the

Digital Humanities remains whether or not digital projects, such as visualizations, serve as real scholarship.

Over the past two decades, many books and journal articles have addressed these issues surrounding digital humanities. In a 1998 *Perspectives on History* article entitled “Can You Do Serious History on the Web,” Carl Smith argued that in order to qualify for that classification, projects must include work that is “responsibly based on primary sources, is intelligently informed by relevant scholarship, and makes a clear argument or group of arguments.”55 His digital project, *The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory*, incorporated over 300 primary sources including photographs, texts, films, lithographs, and songs. Spread over 350 webpages, the online exhibit told the story of the fire in a dynamic way, giving viewers the opportunity to explore the content at their own leisure and interact with it in a way that they could not within the confines of a book (Figure 1). He states that the site was not meant to act as a substitute for books or traditional scholarship, but rather to complement it by adding an online exhibit with “more texture” than otherwise possible before the digital age.56 In addition to the extensive website, the content became accessible through a smartphone app available through Apple’s iTunes store in 2012. Smith’s work clearly relied on original research with primary sources and presented his findings with a fresh perspective.

Writing in 1999, digital history pioneer Edward Ayers observed that “other parts of the academy have sustained long-running debates over the effect of electronic media on writing, but those discussions have bypassed the historical profession almost entirely.” He envisioned using technology to change the way historians present their work, from multi-layered electronic books to virtual simulations of past worlds. Critics worried that digital works lacked the depth of the traditional monograph and its deep analysis, but Ayers argued that audiences in the modern age have grown accustomed to filling in the gaps when creating a narrative, citing film and television.

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as examples, yet historians failed to take advantage of new technology that could further the profession. He observed that computers offer historians a greater ability to search archives and data than ever before, allowing them to discover new connections among different media. This “hypertextual” history, as Ayers called it, could be a catalyst in creating more multidimensional narratives that include a blending of social science methods, yet Ayers recognized that some see this as a threat to standard practice. He stressed that historians need to embrace the new direction and lead the charge in shaping future historical narratives; otherwise the profession risks continued “erosion of authority” and missed opportunities to create new and dynamic history.58

Ayers’ own Valley of the Shadow project demonstrated the possibilities of digital scholarship (Figure 2). Using thousands of primary documents including private letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and census records, the team created an online archive comparing Augusta County, Virginia and Franklin County, Pennsylvania, two communities on opposing sides of the Civil War. The result brought to life individual voices that were otherwise obscured in archives and allowed site visitors to interact with the documents from multiple perspectives and discover how these communities experienced the war.59

58 Edward L. Ayers, "The Past and Future of Digital History."
Historian David Staley’s 2003 book, *Computers, Visualization, and History: How New Technology Will Transform Our Understanding of the Past* provided useful insights into the changes occurring within and outside of the profession. Staley pointed out that traditionally, historians equated the only “serious history” with “written history.” When properly researched and constructed, he argued, visualizations are not only as useful as monographs, but they can communicate concepts and spatial relationships that written text alone cannot.\(^60\) He defined

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visualization as “any graphic that organizes meaningful information in multidimensional spatial form.”\textsuperscript{61}

In their 2006 book, \textit{Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web}, Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig explored some of the “promises and perils” facing digital historians. Although technology underwent changes since its publication, the theories they addressed remain relevant. The authors identified seven advantages of digital scholarship over analogue methods that merit further discussion: \textit{capacity}, \textit{accessibility}, \textit{flexibility}, \textit{diversity}, \textit{manipulability}, \textit{interactivity}, and \textit{hypertextuality} (non-linearity). They also observed five potential problems that digital historians may encounter: \textit{quality}, \textit{durability}, \textit{readability}, \textit{passivity}, and \textit{inaccessibility}.\textsuperscript{62}

The first advantage Cohen and Rosenzweig identify is the storage \textit{capacity} technology offers digital historians. The ability to archive thousands of documents, photos, books, newspapers, and other media on a single hard drive or website has opened the door to new ways of approaching the historical record. As computers become faster and capacity increases, more data can be digitized and duplicated that might otherwise be forgotten, neglected, or perhaps lost over time.\textsuperscript{63}

The capacity to store this data leads to the second advantage of digital history—\textit{accessibility}. Online access to previously closed, restricted, or distant archives makes primary and secondary sources available in a way not possible before. The rise of the Internet also provides scholars with a new way of presenting their research, making it instantly accessible.

\textsuperscript{61} David J. Staley, \textit{Computers, Visualization, and History}, 3.
\textsuperscript{62} Cohen and Rosenzweig, \textit{Digital History}, 3.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 3
anywhere in the world. Cohen and Rosenzweig stress the cost-effectiveness of electronic publishing allows historians to reach a wider audience than they could with traditional printing alone. They state the openness of the web has implications for the general public as well, citing the ability of community historical societies, students, and genealogists to connect worldwide.64

The third advantage lies in digital history’s flexibility. Combining sounds, pictures, and texts in multiple ways allows for a more dynamic understanding of the past. Audiences can engage the material on a two-way basis, rather than with the author-pupil approach inherent in books. Cohen and Rosenzweig contend this fourth advantage of interactivity helps foster collaboration, shared authority, and “multiple forms of historical dialogue.”65 They also note that being able to engage directly with data in different ways demonstrates the manipulability of digital media. Being able to quickly search large quantities of text, extract hidden information from databases, or compare multimedia sources over time may lead to new patterns or discoveries that eluded traditional scholarship.66 Finally, they stress the diversity and hypertextuality of digital history. The ability for professional as well as amateur historians to easily publish information on the web opens up scholarship to a more diverse audience and can give voice to those with previously marginalized histories. Being able to consume history in a non-linear, or hypertextual, manner allows these multiple perspectives to emerge from the same sources, as opposed to one “grand narrative.”67

Despite the many advantages inherent in digital history, Cohen and Rosenzweig are quick to point out that scholars face some possible pitfalls as well. First, the durability of some sources

64 Cohen and Rosenzweig, Digital History, 4.
65 Ibid., 4, 5, and 7.
66 Ibid., 7.
67 Ibid., 8.
is not yet known. Letters and diaries often prove invaluable to researchers reconstructing past events, but the question of how to archive records such as email, “tweets”, and text messages mean that vast amounts of communication may be lost to future historians. They cite the daily loss of federal government records as just one example. Even if archivists could save all digital sources, rapid technological change brings with it the possibility these files could not be opened.

Second, some forms of digital scholarship may present problems of *readability*. The authors note that most scholarly books and articles typically follow a common organizational structure with an introduction, argument, and conclusion. By contrast, the hypertextual nature of digital scholarship, while an advantage, can sometimes be challenging to navigate and thus obscure the scholar’s thesis or make following a narrative confusing.68

A third potential problem Cohen and Rosenzweig recognized stems from the nature of technology itself, noting that “computers are good at ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ but historians prefer words like ‘maybe,’ ‘perhaps,’ and ‘it’s more complicated than that.” They wonder if some websites might actually encourage a form of *passivity* rather than inspire critical thinking, arguing some are little more than an online version of television. This leads to the fourth concern—*quality*. Like conventional historical sources, digital resources vary in terms of quality and authenticity. The authors point to the abundance of sub-par or inaccurate information posted online and stress that historians must “establish a new structure of historical legitimation and authority.” Finally, they argue that the biggest threat of the digital age may paradoxically be *inaccessibility*. While the digitization of archival records is a boon to historical research, Cohen and Rosenzweig worry that Internet monopolies, disparities in computer ownership, and copyright issues could erode the

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68 Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, 11.
access created in the digital era. They argue that historians must lead the way in confronting these issues to ensure the web retains its openness and for the advantages of digital history to outweigh its potential pitfalls.69

Rosenzweig further examined the issues of authenticity and the nature of open-source scholarship in his 2006 article, “Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past.” He noted that the history profession is rooted in individual authorship and the concept of collective contribution seems to go against the professional norms of most scholars. Yet, the Wikipedia relies on crowd-sourced material contributed by anyone from amateurs to professionals, making the entries freely available for use on other locations, even commercially. This new model of authorship presents both opportunities and concerns for scholars. As Rosenzweig points out, despite the democratization of information within the site, Wikipedia only presents the “conventional and accepted wisdom” of a particular subject, even if incomplete or containing inaccuracies. The rules do not allow for original research or interpretations that dispute the consensus viewpoint. This presents a problem for historians, who by nature strive to “break new ground” and receive peer recognition, either for tenured academic positions or acknowledgment of their scholarly contributions. Rosenzweig believed that historians have a responsibility to embrace the potential of open-source collaboration. He argued that instead of bemoaning the quality of web-based information, scholars should seize the opportunity to contribute to the rapidly expanding online knowledge base.70

69 Cohen and Rosenzweig, Digital History, 15.
Yet six years later, the profession still seemed skeptical of Wikipedia. In the February 2012 issue of *Perspectives on History*, then-AHA president William Cronon echoed Rosenzweig’s call for scholars to embrace the site and contribute information rather than lament the erosion of an “intellectual monopoly they once took for granted.” Cronon stressed that while Wikipedia was not always the best example of scholarly work, the website did provide a useful service as a gateway to a given subject. In addition, the democratization process gave voice to those previously marginalized within traditional academia. He argued that the best way for historians to maintain scholarly authority in this increasingly de-centralized digital world was to improve upon the website’s entries. Cronon’s advice was, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.”

**Spatial Turn**

At the core of this thesis project is the concept of spatial history. Simply put, spatial history examines human movement through both relational and physical space over time. This project tracks the migrations of various groups from one geographic space to another, but it also explores the cultural adaptations over time in the constructed spaces these groups created.

Historians have always focused on change over time, but with the advent of computers and new technologies such as GIS, space has become an important part of studying history. According to Edward Ayers, this so-called Spatial Turn, has been more of an “evolutionary

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process rather than an abrupt revolution.” In his article, “Turning Toward Place, Space, and Time,” Ayers traces the beginning of this shift to the 1970s, when geographers first began using computer models and GIS to explore spaces and maps.

Richard White identified three concepts of space in his 2010 article, “What is Spatial History?” The first was spatial practice, or the “movement of people, goods, and information through time and constructed spaces.” This is represented in the plantation economies of the South by the slave trade, the transfer of musical traditions, and the agricultural knowledge exchanged in each region. The second form was representations of space, signified by how plantations were designed, how communities were constructed, and how zoning affected the urban landscapes. In other words, these are constructed spaces defined by human action. The last form was representational space, meaning the symbolic associations of particular places. Examples of this type include the Praise House throughout the Gullah region or People’s Square in New Orleans.

In Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS are Changing Historical Scholarship, Anne Kelly Knowles stressed that virtually all primary sources contain some sort of geographic and temporal information that can be used to reveal geo-spatial relationships of historical evidence. For instance, one primary source archive for this project contains the 2300 WPA ex-slave narratives collected during the 1930s and analyzed by historians for years. The

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74 Richard White, “What is Spatial History?”, Para 8, 17.
75 Ibid., Para 10.
76 Ibid., para13.
records list the dates and places these interviews were conducted. Mapping this information is one way to examine spatial qualities. But within the text and audio of the recordings, another movement becomes evident when the subjects describe their enslavement in, say, South Carolina and their migration to other parts of the country during Reconstruction.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Background

In 2012, Max Edelson and Bill Ferster from the University of Virginia received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant to develop MapScholar. Their objective was to create a tool that scholars could use to build compelling visualizations without the need for costly software programs or extensive institutional support. As opposed to standalone software packages, MapScholar employs open-source technology that acts as a portal to link multimedia from other online sources such as Google Earth/Maps, Flickr, You Tube, and digital archive collections. Ferster refers to this concept as a “loose collection of parts.” The ability to leverage the power of these fully developed commercial products within the platform eliminates the need to replicate them, develop continuous updates, or provide vast bandwidth storage.

The MapScholar framework addresses several of the hurdles facing digital historians. First, the program is free and easily accessible, unlike some other programs such as Omeka or ArcGIS that require specific operating systems, webhosting subscriptions, and institutional support to make them run effectively. With MapScholar, there is no special programming to learn as the framework integrates with a spreadsheet, such as Google Docs, to create the visualization. The system completely runs in the Cloud, so there are no downloads or hardware requirements necessary. Once a user creates the data spreadsheet (stored online), they copy and paste its hyperlink at the end of the MapScholar URL in any web browser to create the

78 To read more about this grant, visit the MapScholar website, http://mapscholar.org/mapscholar-wins-neh-digital-humanities-implementation-grant-3-2/
79 Quote from discussions with Bill Ferster.
visualization. To make a change to the site, one simply goes into the Google spreadsheet and makes the necessary adjustments, republishes the spreadsheet, and refreshes the web browser window to rapidly reflect the new information (Figure 3). This capability is perhaps MapScholar’s most exciting feature because the visualization does not have to become static, but can adapt over time as new resources or technology become available.

![Google Spreadsheet](https://example.com/image.jpg)

**Figure 3:** The Google Spreadsheet used in creating this project.

For instance, say the photo files are currently stored in an online Flickr account and another technology surpasses its functionality. A user would only need to link the MapScholar program to the new repository via the Google spreadsheet. This adaptability means that
visualizations never need be obsolete, as MapScholar can incorporate new web applications on the fly without upgrading the program or downloading a special plugin.

As with any new digital tool, however, digital historians may face some initial challenges with MapScholar. As of this writing, the platform is nearing completion, meaning that new capabilities are being added and adapted in an effort to improve the sites. Scholars attempting to build a site may find this frustrating, since these changes can occur quickly while the final product is completed. Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive documentation and what does exist is somewhat out-of-date. This issue will be resolved soon, however, as the University of Virginia began creating tutorials during the spring 2014 semester as part of the NEH grant. Full documentation should be available by fall 2014 when the application goes live in the classroom.

In addition, one of MapScholar’s major benefits—the ability to act as a hub for other web applications—means that it relies on multiple parts to function correctly. If, for example, the Library of Congress website is down for maintenance or budget cuts (as happened during this process), those resources are unavailable when loading the visualization. If Flickr has a hiccup, those images may not load correctly when needed. Finally, longevity of a MapScholar site requires that hyperlinks contained within the Google spreadsheet be updated if the original files move, otherwise the site will display an error message. Users must be mindful when transferring media linked to the site, as these links will need to be changed. That being said, all digital technology contains an inherent obsolescence that creates issues for the digital historian.
Creating a visualization requires a basic knowledge of computer skills in addition to the time necessary to input data. This may require additional training and collaboration with technology experts in or outside the historical field. Bill Ferster from the University of Virginia provided valuable feedback and guidance throughout this project’s development. His recently published *Interactive Visualizations: Insight Through Inquiry* proves a good resource for those wishing to create digital history projects. The book is structured around the ASSERT acronym model—Ask a question, Search for information, Structure that information, Envision the answer, Represent the visualization, and Tell a story. This framework provides a solid platform for digital humanists wishing to provide an alternative to text-only based interpretations and forms the methodology employed during this project. At the same time, ASSERT reflects traditional scholarship in its research methods and use of primary source material to form a compelling historical argument. What follows is an examination of how this project addressed each of these areas and an explanation of the build-out process.

**Ask a Question**

The idea that specific slave plantation systems influenced cultural development is not a new theory. Ira Berlin, Eugene Genovese, and Charles Joyner, to name a few, have explored the

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connection in their many published volumes. The aspect I sought to address was how to tell the story in a more dynamic way using the new digital tools available today. The story of cultural development and expression is a fascinating one, but music can sometimes get lost in translation through books. It is one thing to read about a song, but quite another to hear it and compare it to other regions.

This project addressed three main questions. First, what is the geo-temporal relationship between agricultural production and the development of black folk music in different regions of the southern United States? If there is indeed a connection, how can the story be told digitally in a more engaging manner than possible with text alone? After surveying the available technologies, I decided to use the MapScholar platform to create the digital project as this seemed to offer the best combination of functionality, efficiency, and presentation. With the digital tool selected, the third issue was how best to structure the various forms of primary source material and build out the visualization. Using maps, audio recordings, census data, and video, the result shows how regional music developed over time due to migration patterns, spatial influences, and crop production.

Search for Information

As more universities and government archives digitize their collections, the number of online primary sources available to researchers increases. Many are available for inclusion in a digital project under the “Fair Use” clause and I relied on several of these repositories for this
endeavor. The David Rumsey Map Collection, in particular, features nearly 50,000 historical maps from the 18th and 19th centuries including several from the Carolinas, Chesapeake, Africa, and Atlantic World. All the images have been scanned and uploaded using the latest high-resolution technology, important in a MapScholar site as this allows viewers to zoom in and study the map in detail. Researchers can create a free account, login, and begin building sets of maps for their particular project using one of the several web applications such as Google Earth and Luna Browser embedded into the site. Once the sets are created, images can be linked to or downloaded without restriction for non-commercial use under the Creative Commons license (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The David Rumsey Map Collection

Another useful collection for this project was the Library of Congress site “American Memory.” The site features nearly 30,000 maps, audio files, field recordings, and manuscripts relating to American history, with specific sections on African-American history as well as the performing arts (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The Library of Congress "American Memory" homepage

Other online resources helpful in building the project included “Music of the Louisiana Gulf Coast: Southern Spaces,” The University of South Carolina Library’s “Sanborn Fire Maps of South Carolina” collection, Emory University’s “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database,”

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and Dr. Gwendolyn Hall’s “Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1718-1820,” housing a database that includes slave ship records, family names, and ethnicity statistics for the Louisiana region. It is important to note that the slave ship manifests and slave origins cannot be considered one hundred percent accurate, due to the nature of the slave trade and falsification of documents. Therefore, these numbers represent general trends and not absolute numbers of ethnicities.83

After studying the secondary literature on the Gullah region and searching online databases, it became obvious I needed to schedule a trip to South Carolina to conduct original research in this area. I spent the week of August 11-August 18, 2013 in Charleston and surrounding areas exploring Gullah culture. The first stop was the College of Charleston’s Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. The Center features two collections in particular that proved to be good resources. The first, The John’s Island Culture Collection, contained the original manuscripts, oral history recordings, and notes collected by Guy and Candie Carawan during their time living in the John’s Island community in early 1960s. The collection also houses the original Robert Yellin photographs from the same time period. Both Carawan and Yellin granted permission for scholars wishing to include the items in their work, but unfortunately, the Center does not have available funds to digitize these materials. Nevertheless, they allow researchers to create their own files from the collection. I was able to convert more than two-dozen images for use in the MapScholar site and listen to the original oral histories of the people featured in the photographs.

The interviews were previously transcribed, but the Avery Center lacked the technology to convert the original tapes to audio files. The other notable discovery at the Avery Research Center was the Walter Pantovic Collection of maps, early newspapers from the 1800s, and runaway slave and auction notices. Reading these notices confirmed Peter Wood’s assertion that South Carolina planters were knowledgeable of and desired certain ethnicities for rice production. I was able to scan some of these items to include on the site. The Atlantic World map featured in that section came from this collection.

I then conducted an interview with Alphonso Brown—musician, author, and owner of Gullah Tours in Charleston. We discussed music, the enduring nature of Gullah culture in the face of recent land development on the Sea Islands, and the rebirth of Gullah pride. He suggested I make a visit to St. Helena Island near Beaufort to tour the Praise Houses and see the Penn Center, opened in 1862 as an exclusively African-American school and now serving as a Gullah cultural center. I was able to photograph the Penn Center and the Praise Houses and see first-hand what life is like today on the island. In contrast to Hilton Head or similar places that have been overrun with development and tourists, St. Helena embraces and is striving to preserve its Gullah roots. While in Beaufort, I visited the special collections department at the Beaufort County Library, known for its wealth of Gullah History. The archivist, Grace Morris Cordial, provided many good study resources and although most were secondary in nature, they were valuable in gaining a deeper understanding of Gullah culture.
With the research trip completed, it was time to begin building the site. In its current stage of development, MapScholar relies on the use of a Google Spreadsheet to reference the various online resources (refer back to Figure 3 above). During the second phase, plans include developing a wizard and tutorial that will help guide scholars as they input images and other files, but this will not roll out until the official launch during fall 2014. In the meantime, most of the instructional material for this project came directly from a series of conversations, Skype video calls, and emails with Bill Ferster as the program developed.

After locating the desired resources on the web and processing the research trip files, the next step required uploading any image or multimedia files locally stored on a hard drive to an online repository. In this case, a Flickr account seemed the best option because of its easy access and ability to store images in “sets,” helping with organization. Flickr also allows users to link to multiple sizes of the same image, a useful feature as will become apparent when discussing the spreadsheet setup. Once the images are online, MapScholar can access them via the Google Doc directly, or through another type of element known as a SHIVA layer.

SHIVA is an acronym for the SHANTI Interactive Visualization Application, developed by the University of Virginia’s Science, Humanities & Arts Network of Technological Initiative (SHANTI). Essentially, it is a web application designed to create elements, or layers, which can be referenced in the main Google Spreadsheet (Figure 6).
Figure 6: The SHIVA Interface

Figure 6 above shows the options available through the SHIVA tools application. Users can create timelines, charts, photomontages, textual elements, and more, as well as an ePoster, an element that digitally mimics a traditional scholarly poster presentation. Like MapScholar, a SHIVA element requires that information first be entered into a Google spreadsheet and referenced in the element. The completed element is then stored in the interface’s “eStore” with a unique identification number and hyperlink. This is the hyperlink that is referenced in the main Google spreadsheet.

With the combination of map images, audio, video, and SHIVA files, one can begin populating the Google spreadsheet. The document’s structure is specific to MapScholar and
requires the use of a template that contains geo-referencing fields that tell the program where to overlay the items on the Google Earth model. Each row in the spreadsheet contains the information for one particular item, referred to as a mob, short for map object. A mob may be a map image, an audio file, a SHIVA element, chapter header, timeline, text box, or link to a website. The column fields for each mob tell MapScholar how to treat the item when creating the visualization (Figure 7).

![Google spreadsheet mob fields](https://example.com/mob-fields.png)

Figure 7: The Google spreadsheet mob fields.

The first field is a unique identification (id) number. This can be any number the user chooses, but each item must have its own identifier. The next column is the title, which appears as a clickable link on the MapScholar shelf. Next is the description field, which can contain 5-20
words giving context to the mob and is used to help create a narrative. The *tags* column can contain a series of comma-separated words or phrases that help search or group particular *mobs*. The following three fields—*small, medium, and url*—all contain links to the map images stored in an image repository such as Flickr. This is where Flickr’s ability to generate different sizes of the same file without loading three unique images is beneficial, as MapScholar uses each one to display the map effectively. The *small* link links to the lowest resolution file and is used to generate image thumbnails in the MapScholar home view. The *medium* file is used when clicking on the particular map, and the *url* field links to the highest resolution image. This is the image that loads when a user wants to zoom in and see a map’s detail. For sound, video, or SHIVA layers, the *url* field is where the hyperlink to that element resides. The next series of fields—*status, start, end, north, south, east, west, rotation, goto, and base*—tell MapScholar how to display the particular mob. *Status* simply determines whether an item, such as a chapter heading, will be displayed open or closed when the site launches or whether an audio/video file will automatically play when its link is clicked. The other fields contain the geo-referencing coordinates that overlay the map image in Google Earth and how it reacts when selected in the shelf.

Envision the Answer

Once the source material was selected, the focus shifted to how to best address the research question, in this case how to visually show the relationship between cultivation and folk music. The evidence was clear that in the Gullah region, rice production led to the creation of a
predominately African population along the coast and islands. They retained many of the language traits and songs from West Africa due to their relative isolation from the smaller yet dominant society. In the Chesapeake, the tobacco industry employed many European indentured servants in the early years of the colony, but as the plantation system became the norm the black population increased. Close proximity between the two races led to acculturation, with each adopting some of the other’s music and instrumentation. Even today, some of the old-time and Bluegrass music heard in the region among white musicians directly stems from black tradition. In New Orleans, the cosmopolitan nature of the city due to its diverse colonial period and Caribbean influence brought with sugar plantation slaves, led to its unique musical forms of zydeco and creole music. Evidence today can be seen in the Mardi Gras celebrations that bear a striking resemblance to the Carnival traditions of the Caribbean and South America, where sugar was the dominant agricultural product.

Represent the Visualization

The next step in the process was to actually create, or represent, the visualization. In order to populate the MapScholar site, one must first construct the Google Spreadsheet as outlined above, linking to the various online repositories, websites, and multimedia files. Once that is complete, the user navigates to the MapScholar website using any web browser such as Google Chrome, Safari, or Firefox. After the skeleton site loads, one simply opens up the spreadsheet and copies the url link and pastes it to the end of the MapScholar string, using a “?” symbol as a connector. The user’s data will then populate, revealing the intended website.
Changes or future updates can be occur quickly by making the appropriate correction in the Google doc, republishing it to the web, and refreshing the web browser window. The new information will appear instantaneously. This is one of the platform’s strengths, as it requires no programming or help of an I.T. department to upload to the server overnight or other cumbersome manner.

Tell a Story

One of the goals of any scholarly work, whether a traditional text or a digital product, is to translate research into an argument, or story. By design, the original version of MapScholar featured an “Atlas” view, a reference to its mapping capabilities. The perspective listed the elements in the right column under chapter headings. Over the course of the project, I tried to determine how I would tell a story with a list of items with little context. After discussing with matter with Bill Ferster, he suggested their newly developed “Book” view, allowing a more narrative approach to the visualization. Users still have the option of navigating via the “Atlas” default view, thereby exploring the data in their own way, but the “Book” view gives the creator the opportunity to develop a guided experience through the use of pages. In the Results chapter that follows, I explain the completed site and through screenshots discuss the functionality and significance of the various elements.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The completed MapScholar site (Figure 8) features maps, audio, timelines, and photographs that show how the rice, sugar, and tobacco economies influenced the choice of slave imports and the culture that developed in each region. The spatial dimension is represented by three aspects: geographic spaces (maps) and human movement between them, representative or constructed spaces such as the Gullah Corridor, which does not appear on a map by name yet refers to an undefined area where people shared cultural traits, and representational space reflected in the Praise Houses of John’s Island and St. Helena Island, where the building itself is a physical space but the sense of community and what these buildings meant culturally extends far past their four walls.

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84 To view the completed digital portion of this project, click on the link or copy and paste into any web browser, http://www.viseyes.org/mapscholar/?https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0Aj-hGmF_mBI8dEdtS3AwbE5FaW9BdG9tSXBaenlWeUE&usp=drive_web#gid=0
What became apparent through visualization is that while the context of the slave trade and the different plantation economies created the constructed space where these distinct cultures emerged, the geographic space played a major role in how these cultures evolved over time. Well into the middle of the twentieth century, for example, the Sea Islands and the mountainous regions of Appalachia remained relatively isolated from outside cultural influences. Following the Second World War, however, the advent of the Interstate system and the coastal bridge projects exposed the population to outside influence and began to threaten the uniqueness of these regions (Figures 9 and 10). As tourists and development descended upon the Sea Islands, property values increased and young Gullah people began to leave and find work in the cities. Those remaining were often shamed into thinking their culture was backward and not worth
preserving. As the map in Figure 11 shows, by 2005, St. Helena Island had undergone
development and roads now traversed the entire island, whereas a mere forty years earlier the
community still retained many of its cultural traditions handed down since the early plantation
era. Tourism and building projects now threaten the fishing industry and agricultural production.
Census records from 1790 to 2000 show the population of Beaufort County’s coastal region
remained fairly consistent from the first recording until 1950, when the number rapidly rose from
an average of 22,000 persons to over 150,000 by the year 2000 (Figure 12). 85 By looking at the
road maps side by side in the MapScholar presentation, one can see how these two trends are
linked (Figures 9, 10, 11).

85 Insert census record footnote here.
Figure 9: South Carolina Road Map, 1927
Figure 10: South Carolina Road Map, 1940
Figure 11: 2005 Beaufort County road map showing extent of development
In the Chesapeake region, the close proximity of European indentured servants, African slaves, and white masters produced a society where a gradual mixing of cultural traits occurred, particularly where music was concerned. Audio recordings reveal the similarities between African-American instrumentals that include banjo and fiddle and those of their white counterparts. The maps of the area show how certain areas in the western region were isolated through mountains and cut by rivers. This meant the rural population spent years in isolation before the advent of the interstate system and myriad roads exposed them to outside influences. In the eastern part, maps show increasing population density through the development of towns.
By the time of the tobacco plantation society became established, the cross-cultural exchange of musical traditions had already occurred.

In the Louisiana region, French and British colonial maps give clues as to the multicultural nature of the region when viewed as a collection. Census records reveal a relatively mixed population of European, African, and Afro-Caribbean inhabitants that eventually formed the creole culture New Orleans became synonymous with. The music combines the French creole language with the rhythms found in Haiti, Cuba, and South America. This can be linked to the sugar industry, which demanded a certain type of labor. Its harsh nature resulted in shorter life spans than in the Chesapeake or Gullah, requiring a constant influx of new imports.
CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis project was to provide fresh perspective regarding the development of folk music in three regions of the American South using digital technology. The MapScholar site communicates this dynamically through images, audio, and video components. This has many advantages for end-users, as they are not confined to one interpretation of research and analysis. They can engage the primary sources directly, making them active participants in the story. No longer is the author the sole mediator—the audience can follow the author’s narrative or explore on the evidence on their own. Surveys have shown that when people can personally interact with historical sources, ranging from family photos, museum pieces, or documentaries, they are more likely to take an interest in the subject.86 In the tech-savvy world of today’s born-digital generation, a program like MapScholar has educational possibilities as a useful tool in the classroom.

A common refrain heard in history departments from undergraduates is that history was “boring” in their past academic career. Today’s youth are bombarded with video, audio, and instantly available data. This may be the only way some receive information. The expectation that all learning should come from books is not realistic in today’s academic climate. The challenge is how to develop critical-thinking skills, analysis of historical events, and exchange of ideas among a growing number of students whose sole reference source may be a computer or handheld device. This is where a digital tool like MapScholar can provide a context for historical dialogue.

For example, say the topic is a military campaign or land development over time. A single historic map of a battle or a specific plot map is only one reference point. A static map may be a valuable historic artifact in and of itself, but when combined with a collection of maps, then it becomes part of a larger narrative. An educator could ask students to assemble a group of, say, ten to fifteen historic maps ranging over a fifty-year period within MapScholar and engage them in critical analysis of primary resources. What can these maps disclose regarding changing ideas of land use or how can these maps tell the story of why a particular army emerged as a victor? MapScholar’s ability to geo-reference these sources onto a Google Earth layer enables viewers to see these maps in relief, revealing topographical features not visible in the two-dimensional version.

As with any creative endeavor, this project evolved in directions unforeseen at the outset. At various times throughout the process, these developments were encouraging, while at other times they presented challenges to overcome. As exciting as it was to create an original project with a cutting-edge technology, one of the biggest challenges was that because MapScholar was still in the beta development stage, the program had glitches to correct. At times, items did not function as expected and new features were added throughout the process. In addition, the documentation was somewhat outdated or incomplete early on, requiring many emails and troubleshooting calls with the developers. In many ways, the research and completed MapScholar site reflects both the “promises and perils” of digital humanities put forth by Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig in 2006.87 From a historiographical context, this raises the questions

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87 Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*. See pages 28-31 of this paper for a full discussion.
of how their observations translate to digital history as of this writing (2014) and how does the MapScholar platform address these issues?

Cohen and Rosenzweig argued that digital history promised to increase accessibility of historical sources and allow more people to research unexplored topics. There have been many technological advances over the past decade; the development of tablets and smartphones alone allows easier access to Internet data than ever before. Web applications such as Kindle and Google Books make thousands of electronic texts available at low cost for students, while online databases such as JSTOR and EBSCO put journal articles, newspapers, and government documents at the fingertips of researchers. Open-source digital archives allow access to more primary sources in a range of different media than just ten years ago. MapScholar takes full advantage of these technologies and highlights the flexibility and interactivity they spoke of by allowing the audience multiple ways to view the sources and form conclusions. Since the platform leverages the power of the Cloud and links to other web applications, it demonstrates the flexibility of digital tools in terms of setup, operation, and adaptability over time.

However, even with these developments, the perils they presented still remain. Cohen and Rosenzweig stressed that digital historians faced issues of quality, readability, inaccessibility, and durability. Throughout this project’s development, each one of these factors presented hurdles to overcome and proved that these aspects still remain an inherent part of doing digital history.

The issue of quality surfaced early on in the process. One of MapScholar’s viewing features allows users to zoom in on a particular map, revealing great detail. This requires a very high-resolution file. Some of the media found in digital collections are presented for web-
viewing only, meaning that they have a low resolution for faster page loading. Even though these images may be ideal to include in the story, they represent poor choices for a MapScholar site. In other instances, an item may have been digitized using older technology or outdated file systems, which hamper the readability of the source. At other times, a particular web browser can only read a particular type of audio file, which requires linking to two different file types so that users can interact with the site on a variety of browsers. An example of this occurred when trying to include song files of the John’s Island community. The Firefox web browser can only read an audio file with an “ogg” extension, while Safari and Google Chrome require an mp3 file. This means that both files must be represented in the Google spreadsheet.

The issue of inaccessibility came up a few times during development. During the learning process, some files would not show up when clicked on within the visualization. After spending hours trying to resolve the issue and consulting with Bill Ferster, a simple hash mark in the web link became the solution. At another point, a slow or weak Internet connection resulted in the site not behaving as planned when linked to, as was the case during a conference presentation as well as the thesis defense.

Finally, the problem of durability still remains. A digital project such as this one requires some form of archival capability. Since there is not a program to download and install, the question of how this site will live on after the thesis is complete is still debated. The solution in this instance became a screencast of a user demonstrating the MapScholar site and explaining the various features. In this way, if for some reason MapScholar ceases to exist or links become broken, there is a record of the thesis project results.
These issues are not unique to this project and, as such, require that institutions that choose to have digital history departments develop solutions for students who explore these new technologies. During the course of the project, questions of where any uploaded files would reside, how to translate the digital portion of the thesis into a traditional paper, and how to submit a digital project for review surfaced. It became apparent that while great inroads have occurred within the history department, more collaboration with technology experts are required to resolve these issues.

**Future Research**

While my MapScholar site shows the spatial relationship between cultivation and culture in the three regions chosen, there is still more work to be done. Currently, the Gullah Corridor section is built out more than the Chesapeake and New Orleans sections. The intention is to fully develop all three sections over the next six months and showcase the site at conferences and link to the Visual Eyes website. Some specific layer additions include sugar and tobacco production timelines, more maps showing ethnic origins in the Chesapeake and New Orleans, and an “ePoster” communicating the life of “Priscilla,” a young slave girl from Sierra Leone who arrived in Charleston during the 1700s. What makes her story so compelling is that not only is her life documented through slave records during the Middle Passage, her master’s family kept records of all her descendants. One such person still lives in the Charleston area and traveled Sierra Leone to discover her roots. This is rare for many African-Americans, as most have no genealogical record beyond slavery.
Future sections will look at the Caribbean more fully and perhaps map out Cuba, Haiti, and Barbados, showing how sugar impacted these regions. Other sections could explore the Scots-Irish migration to Appalachia to develop the story of bluegrass and string band music. Maps, audio, and video files in this section would further develop the understanding of how space affected music by demonstrating the diverse local distinctions in playing styles and voice inflections throughout the mountains.

Beyond this particular study, MapScholar promises be a useful educational tool in the classroom, as previously noted. Once the platform is fully implemented in the fall of 2014 with tutorials and instructional documentation, I believe it will become a viable tool to build visualizations and allow static maps to reveal spatial relationships that currently lie hidden in archives.
APPENDIX: PERMISSIONS
Myrtle G. Glasgow
Avery Research Center for
Afro-American History & Culture

Background on the Johns Island Culture Collection being placed in the Avery Research Center:

For several years in the early 1960s I lived and worked on Johns Island, South Carolina. I came originally through my connection with Highlander Folk School to assist in the Citizenship School Program. This program was designed to teach basic literacy skills to enable island residents to register and vote. The idea came to Highlander with Essau Jenkins who was teaching people as they rode the bus, to and from the island. I provided transportation for Mrs. Septima Clark to classes on Johns Island, Edisto, Wadmalaw, and North Charleston, and as a musician, I began to draw songs out of class members and then to write the words on the blackboard.

I was deeply interested in the rich cultural heritage of the islands, particularly the religious expression in Moving Star Hall, a praise house in the Johns Island community. From 1963 through 1965, now joined on Johns Island by my family, I concentrated primarily on cultural work, helping organize a number of community festivals, recording a large amount of music and life stories, producing 210 records of low country songs and stories, and finally editing, with my wife Candie, a book which was a collection of oral histories, songs and photographs. We had invited Bob Yellin, a photographer in New York, to stay with us in the islands and spend a period of time photographing everyday life experiences and religious services in Moving Star Hall.

It is basically this material -- recorded music and interviews, and the Yellin photographs -- that is now being placed at Avery. I have included a few additional photographs by other photographers to round out the collection. These include some photographs from the 1950s by Ioa Derman of the Citizenship Schools; one photograph of Moving Star Hall by Thorsten Horton; some recent pictures of the Moving Star Hall Singers by Made Spees; one picture of the group performing at the Newport Folk Festival by David Gahr.

For many years I have wanted to make these materials available to the Johns Island community. As I visited over the years, I was not sure where the best location would be -- where there would be good community access and also careful treatment of the collection to insure a long life for it and make it available to scholars and serious students of sea island culture. It was then with great pleasure when I came to the islands on a recent trip to explore the possibilities that I established contact with Myrtle Glasgow; that we have worked out a home for the collection at Avery; and that we have established an island community committee to be involved in the planning and use of the collection. This is very much in keeping with the Highlander educational approach and our recent Culture and Community Empowerment project which seeks to help grassroots communities control their own cultural resources.

Guy Carson
June 20, 1986
RE: Permission to use screenshot of homepage

RightsRepro <RightsRepro@chicagohistory.org>
Fri 3/14/2014 5:13 PM

To: Bob Clarke <clarke@knights.ucf.edu>

Dear Robert Clarke,

Thank you for your inquiry. Yes, we believe it is okay for you to include a screenshot of the Great Chicago Fire and Web of Memory website homepage in your thesis. Thanks for checking in!

Best,
Rights & Reproductions

From: Bob Clarke [clarke@knights.ucf.edu]
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2014 4:40 PM
To: RightsRepro
Subject: Permission to use screenshot of homepage

Hello,

My name is Robert Clarke. I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida in the process of completing my Master’s Thesis.

I am creating a digital history project and am including a reference to your website, Great Chicago Fire and Web of Memory, in my historiography chapter.

Is it permissible to insert a screenshot of your homepage for illustrative purposes? Is that considered “fair use”?

Thank you for your time,

Robert Clarke
clarke@knights.ucf.edu
LIST OF REFERENCES


