



HIS 302W/402

Research Seminar:

Spatial History: Putting the Past in its Place

Fall 2021
 W 2:00-4:40pm
 Rush Rhees 362
 Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 pm or by appt.

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 Rush Rhees 445 & 455
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Overview: This research seminar is designed to introduce students to the recent “spatial turn” in historical scholarship and History GIS (HGIS) as a research approach to studying the past. It is essentially a research incubator organized collectively around a methodological approach attuned to the interplay between time and space on various scales, rather than specifically focused on any one particular historical period or region. That said, I am a specialist in the early modern Atlantic maritime world and the global spread of European empires and networks to circa 1820, as well as a social historian and archaeologist interested in finding hidden connections and behavioral patterns within households and communities and the case studies we consider will largely be drawn from these areas. Over the semester, you will develop skills in 1) defining and developing a research topic, 2) critically evaluating existing historical scholarship, 3) understanding different historians’ theoretical and methodological approaches, 4) identifying, evaluating and interpreting primary and secondary sources (including non-documentary evidence), 5) considering perspective and bias present in historical evidence and scholarship, and 6) constructing historical arguments and explanations orally and in written work. By the end of the semester, you will produce a well-crafted 3,000-5,000 word (12-20 page) research paper that explores a geographically grounded historical topic of your choosing based on primary source evidence and likely using GIS or other computational tools to analyze, visualize, and/or disseminate your findings OR a digital history product (website, app) of an equivalent size that also explicitly



interprets historical evidence and makes a substantive historical argument. The skills you learn in this seminar will provide you with a firm foundation to build upon in subsequent courses you take here at the University of Rochester or in graduate study elsewhere. HIS 403 (graduate) students will produce a final research paper in the 5000- to 7500-word range and are expected to demonstrate more sophisticated historiographic engagement with your research topic.

Organization: This course is, in essence, an open-ended conversation about history, what historians do, and how they do it. I view history as a continuing debate between scholarly interpreters, rather than as a fixed, stable script about what happened in the past. Studying the physical historical world is partly a means to the end of understanding history as a process and a discipline. In most weeks, our discussions will focus on a series of questions for you to consider and debate, using either material from short assignments or assigned readings. Your written work will also develop and display skills critical to historical understanding and analysis. Our classroom is furthermore your arena for raising questions generally about academia, liberal arts, and the purpose of history in modern society. At heart, we are entering into a collaborative intellectual venture in which we will all hopefully come to a better understanding of the past through teaching each other.

Assessment: Your grade in this class is based on **class participation** (30%), NINE short reaction papers to weekly readings (20%), and written work associated with developing your **research paper** (50%). Your class participation grade may include various short exercises, small writing assignments, and in-class debates over the course of the semester.

Class Participation: You are expected to attend every class, read the assigned material beforehand, and come prepared to answer the questions posited below and talk about what you have read. Seminars are by nature designed to be question-driven, so you will be expected to think on your feet. In contributing to discussion, quality is more appreciated than quantity. Be courteous and respectful to your peers. A history seminar is not a spectator sport: if you are silent, I will assume you are unprepared rather than brilliant but shy. If it becomes apparent that you have not done the readings or otherwise prepared for class, you will be marked as absent for that day. Unexcused absences will also cause your class participation grade to suffer.

Written Work:

Reaction Papers are 1-2 page, single-spaced summaries of each and all of the weekly readings highlighting their main concepts and arguments, annotated with your critical evaluations of them. You should demonstrate in writing that you've read and understood each of the readings and ideally link them to each other and past readings and discussion. They are not "gut" reactions (I liked...I didn't like...) but rather intellectual considerations. Not all of the assigned readings are paragons of scholarship. Try to allot space in your summaries according to the length of the readings (i.e. a full monograph should get chapter by chapter coverage and more ink than an article). Writing a good reaction paper is actually really tough, since you have very little space and need to communicate efficiently by reducing a work to its essence. Developing this is a great skill that will serve you well in any field, so is worth cultivating. Your grade will be based on your SEVEN best reaction paper grades.

We will develop your final research paper incrementally throughout the semester. Think about potential topics NOW and have one or two tentatively in mind from the start. You have until October 6 before you have to commit fully to any topic. The following week (Oct. 13) you will hand in a written **prospectus**, identifying your topic choice, a bibliography listing primary and secondary sources, and an overview of your research progress thus far. This will be graded and is worth 5% of your research paper grade. On Oct. 27 (Week 9), you will turn in an **outline** of your developing paper when we meet to discuss progress, which is also worth 5% of your research paper grade. A full-text, properly referenced draft of your research paper is due on Tuesday, Nov. 23 and is worth 10% of your grade. This should NOT be a “rough draft” and will be graded as if it is your final submission. You will get back two sets of comments and suggestions (one from me, one from a student peer) that should guide you to make further refinements and improvements before submitting the revised, final version of your research paper on Wednesday, Dec. 15, by noon. This will be worth 30% of your grade. Late submissions will not be accepted and your earlier draft grade will be counted instead.

Required Texts:

Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana* (2001)
Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map* (2008)
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (1990)

NOTE that there are also many articles and chapters from books for which you are also responsible. You will find most of them on the course Blackboard webpage or can get them via JSTOR (see the Rush Rhees Databases), Google Books, or the OG way: paper copies in the library stacks.

The College's credit hour policy for undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of two periods of an hour and twenty minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 302W are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings to prepare for discussions and in researching their topics for the final seminar paper.

UR Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program: Over the course of the semester while developing your short reaction and research papers, you are allowed -- and very much encouraged -- to work with writing tutors and specialists in the College WSAP Center (<http://writing.rochester.edu/center.html>, Rush Rhees Ground floor). They will help you to improve your prose and organization and can serve as ideal readers/sounding boards as you develop your research projects. As a fortune cookie I once opened stated, “Good writing is clear thinking made visible.” The writing center staff can help you to achieve this ideal - if you work with them.

Rush Rhees Research Librarians: You are also encouraged to consult Rush Rhees research librarian Lara Nicosia (lnicosia@library.rochester.edu; 585-275-9298) early and often while developing your research paper. Lara is a specialist in U.S., British, and European history

sources and can help you at all stages of the research project, especially in finding relevant source materials. You can book an appointment with her **HERE...**

Intellectual Honesty Students and faculty at the University must adhere to high standards of academic honesty in all the work that we do. You have already read and signed an academic honesty policy statement indicating that you understand the general principles upon which our work is based. The College Board on Academic Honesty website gives further information on our policies and procedures: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

You are encouraged to discuss course readings and assignments with your fellow students. All written work, however, must be done independently and not in collaboration with one another. To gain appropriate help for your essays, I encourage you to consult fellows in the College Writing, Speaking, & Argument Program. Your papers will require footnotes/endnotes and a “Works Cited” section, following the Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition, format. The Chicago Manual is accessible via the River Campus Libraries catalogue. If you are in doubt about citation methods (which we will go over in class) or are worried about situations that may violate the U of R honor code or constitute plagiarism, I am happy to advise you in advance of submitting your work.

For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association’s “Defining Plagiarism,” <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty>

Please include the UR honor pledge at the end of every paper you submit: “I affirm that I have not given or received any unauthorized help on this assignment, and that this work is my own.”

Accommodation If you have a disability for which you require an academic accommodation, you are encouraged to contact the Office for Disability Resources and me. We will work together to find a solution. Access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. The director of disability resources is Amy Wight (amy.wight@rochester.edu). The access coordinators are Pamela Spallacci (pamela.spallacci@rochester.edu) and Elizabeth Carpenter (elizabeth.carpenter@rochester.edu). The access assistant is Anne Staab (anne.staab@rochester.edu). The Office of Disability Resources is located in Taylor Hall, can be reached via telephone at 585-276-5075, and maintains a website at <http://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/>.

A Note on Communication: It is your responsibility to get to class on time and to submit all your work on time or early in paper form. I check email and phone messages regularly and usually am good about responding to **correct and courteously worded** missives, but don’t expect instant responses and do not assume I got your email. Informal and poorly punctuated/capitalized emails annoy me. If a truly urgent or important situation arises, try to contact me in person, relay a message via the history department, or call me at home (585-678-4704), rather than trust email

alone. Also, do not simply “disappear” if you find yourself overwhelmed or struggling: I can only work with you if I know this is happening, and an early timely intervention can do far more than damage control at semester’s end.

Grading Scale For the papers and other assignment graded out of 100 points, I use the following scale:

* A: 93–100	* C: 73–76
* A-: 90–92	* C-: 70–72
* B+: 87–89	* D+: 67–69
* B: 83–86	* D: 63–66
* B-: 80–82	* D-: 60–62
* C+: 77–79	* E: Failure (59 or below)

For more information on the undergraduate grading scheme, please see: Grading Schemes — AS&E, Office of the University Registrar,
<https://www.rochester.edu/registrar/grading/scheme.html>.

CLASS SCHEDULE

*** Denotes required reading; all non-book required reading can be found in the “Readings” Tab on the left column in Blackboard**

Aug. 25 -- Spatial History: What is it?

Introducing the course, the concepts, and the people who will make it happen for you.

Week I (Sept. 1) -- Definitions and Approaches

Reaction Paper:

- * Richard White, “What is Spatial History?” Stanford University Spatial History Lab Working Papers, 2010
- * Anne Knowles, “GIS and History” in *Placing History*, 1-25
- * *Spatial Humanities*, Introduction
- * David Bodenhamer, “The Potential for Spatial Humanities,” *Spatial Humanities*, 14-30
- * Trevor Harris, “GIS in Archaeology,” *Placing History*, 131-143



Assignment for 9/8: Select a current or past project on Stanford’s **Spatial History website** (<http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/projects.php>) that is advanced enough to have a website and substantial content. Write a 2-3 page review that summarizes the project’s

aim, design/form, content, state of completion, and your assessment of the project's value and effectiveness. Be prepared to report on your project next week in class.



Week II (Sept. 8) The First GIS? London, Cholera, & Multi-scalar History

**Reaction Paper this week = website
evaluation**

* READ: Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*,
all

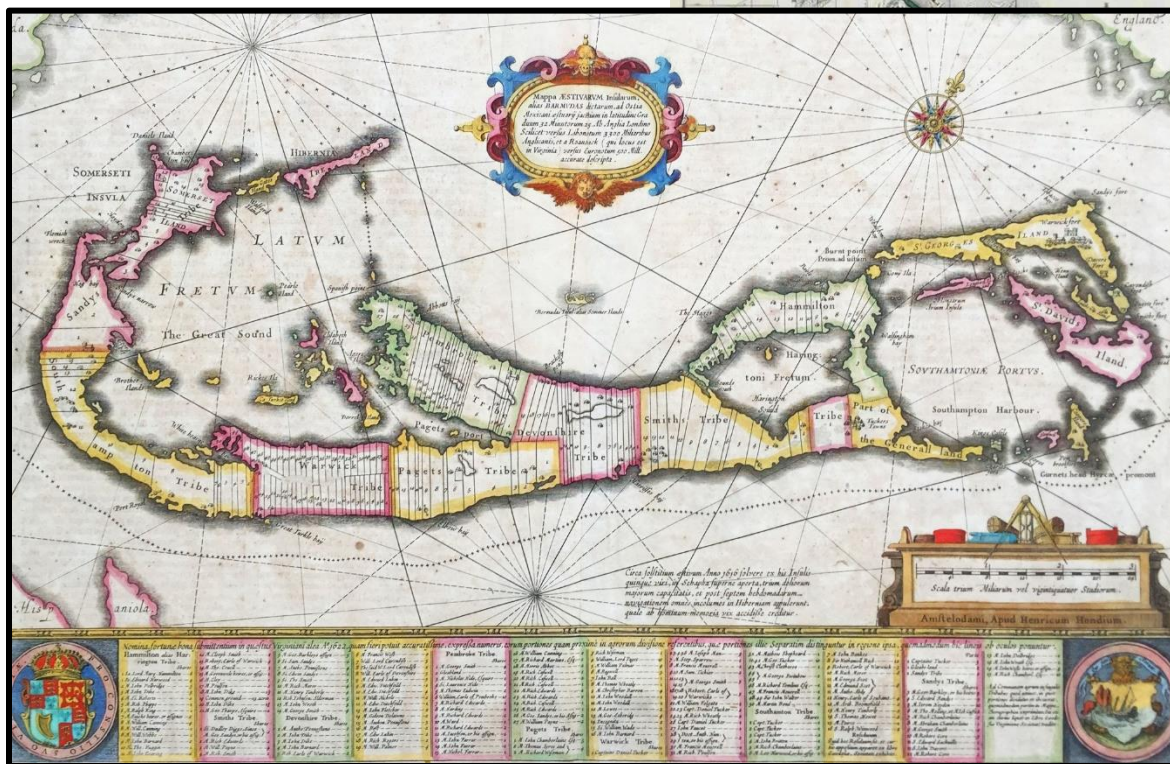
SECOND HALF: Introduction to ArcGIS
(Blair Tinker, Digital Scholar) in computer
lab

Week III (Sept. 15) – Maps and Mapping Events: Making and Unmaking Historical Arguments

Reaction Paper:

- * David Rumsey & Meredith Williams, “Historical Maps in GIS,” *Past Times, Past Places*, 1-18
- * Benjamin Ray, “Teaching the Salem Witch Trials,” *Past Times, Past Places*, 19-33
- * Robert Churchill & Amy Hillier, “Teaching with GIS,” *Placing History*, 61-81

In-Class Project: Norwood's Bermuda & Virtual St. George's



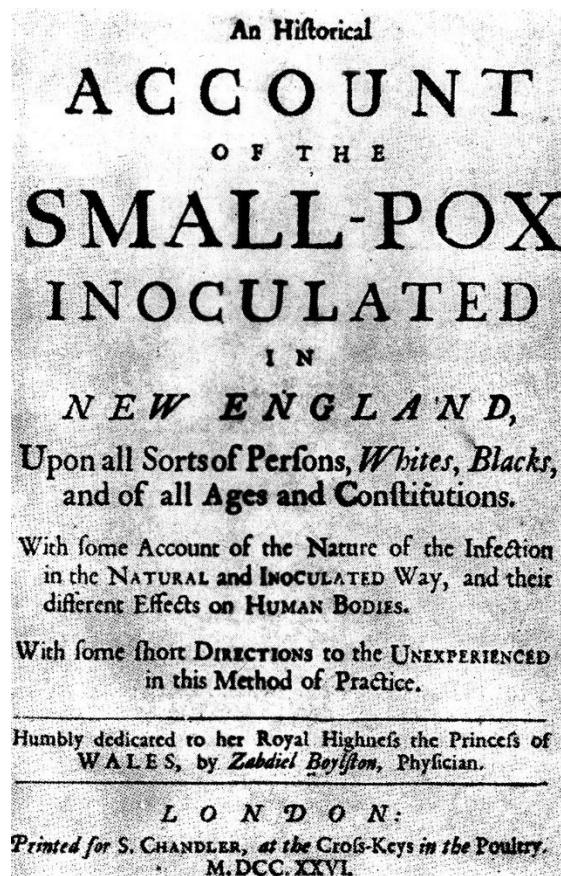
Week IV (Sept. 22) Mapping Communities & Networks

*****All students should meet with me this week in Tuesday office hours or by appointment to discuss potential research paper topics.**

Reaction Paper:

- * Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, all. Think about how you might create a digital/spatial project for this book.
- * VISIT and Explore: [DoHistory.org](https://dohistory.org/) (<https://dohistory.org/>)
- * Amy Hillier, "Redlining in Philadelphia," *Past Times, Past Places*, 79-92
- * VISIT [Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America](#).

In-Class Project: [Rochester's Wards](#)



Week V (Sept. 29) – Epidemics & History

Reaction Paper:

* READ: Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana*, all (especially the second half) and think about how you might create a digital/spatial project for this book.

In-Class Project: Pick a disease, any disease! Speed research and Digital Newspapers

Week VI (Oct. 6) --

History in Very Big
and Quite Small
Spaces:

Empires, Oceans,
Ships & Houses - 2D
and 3D



Reaction Paper:

- * Ian Steele, *The English Atlantic*, 3-93, 132-167 (pay particular attention to “The Papers”)
- * Michael Jarvis “The Material Culture of Ships,” *Jack Tar and Memory*,
- * John Bedell, “Archaeology and Probate Inventories in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Life” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 31 (2000), 223-245
- * Michael Bols, “Creating a GIS for the History of China,” *Placing History*, 27-59
- * WATCH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVnuWXk8w4g&t=6s>

In-Class Project: reanimating households using Probate Inventories

Week VII (Oct. 13) – Topics and Methodology: Defining your research and data qualitatively & quantitatively With Guest Expert Blair Tinker

*****RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE:** report on your topic and goals in class, identifying the data you will use, the scholarship you are engaging, and your research platform (paper/article, website, simulation, etc.)

Reaction Paper:

- * Michael Goodchild, "Combining Space and Time," *Placing History*, 179-197
- * Karen Kemp, "GIS and Spatial Analysis," *Spatial Humanities*, 31-57
- * John Corrigan, "Qualitative GIS and Emergent Semantics," *Spatial Humanities*, 76-88

Class Session: Defining, designing and developing your individual research projects.

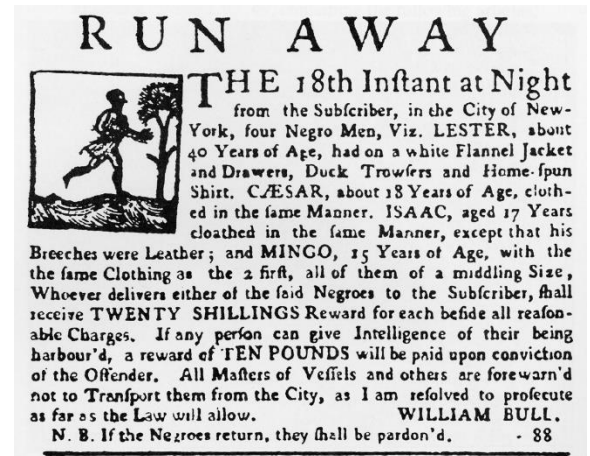
Week VIII (Oct. 20)

Follow the Money (or the rum, or the slaves, or the ships)

Reaction Paper (site evaluations):

- * [The Geography of Slavery in Virginia](#) (website)
- * [Freedom on the Move: Rediscovering the Stories of Self-Liberated People](#) (website)
- * [Slavevoyages.org](#) (website)

In-Class Project: Pick a ship (or captain), any ship! Speed research and Digital Newspapers II



Also check out:

Old Weather (<https://www.oldweather.org/index.html>) – a crowd-sourced initiative to study climate change using historical ship logs.

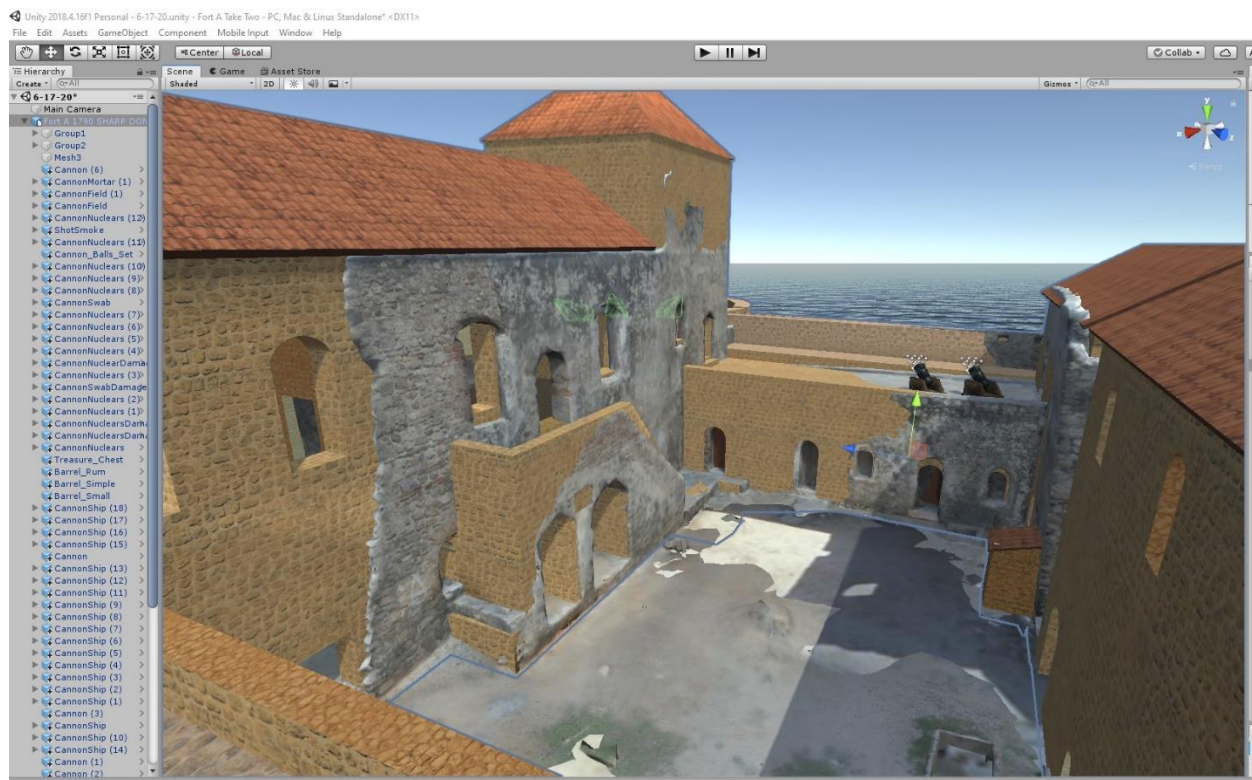
Weather Time Machine (<https://graphics.reuters.com/CLIMATE-CHANGE-ICE-SHIPLOGS/0100B4QE2FC/index.html>) an infographic on Arctic Ice conditions.

Week IX (Oct. 27)

Work Session on Research Project Development

*** Research Paper Outline Due in class

Come to class prepared to report on your research progress since Oct. 13, your experience working with sources and organizing data, and any modifications you've made to your topic and why. The rest of the class will be devoted to targeted trouble-shooting



Week X (Nov. 3)

Immersive Spatial Experiences: Virtual Visits to Places of Pain

We will meet this week in **Studio X** (Carlson Library) to beta-test virtual desktop and VR explorations of Fort Amsterdam and Elmina Castle, two African Slave Trade ports in modern-day Ghana, and strategies for creating meaningful virtual heritage tours of these complex, highly charged historical sites for different audiences.

Reaction Paper Due to following week (submit electronically) evaluating your experiences and thoughts on this evolving project.

Week XI-XII (Nov. 10 & 17) -- No Formal Classes

Use these weeks to develop your research papers. Blair and I will be in the Digital History Lab (Rush Rhees 455/456) during scheduled class time for conversations and consultation if you need help or to talk through research and technology issues.

Week XIII

***** Research Papers DUE on Tuesday Nov. 23 during Office Hours (MUST BE an electronic submission)**

Peer Review: I will be assigning student research papers to each of you for a formal written peer review for our Dec. 1 class. You should send a copy of your review to me and also to its author on Tuesday, Nov. 30 for their consideration.

Nov. 24 (W) No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Week XIV (Dec. 1)

Brief in-class meeting for a general status appraisal, then individual meetings with me to discuss your research papers.

Week XV (Dec. 8)

Final Class

Formal In-Class presentations of your research topics – limited to 3 PPT/presentation slides and 10 minutes each, with 5 minutes Q&A. Please also consider and reflect on how the technologies you used shaped or influenced how you organized and communicated your research and the degree to which emphasizing spatial aspects of history mattered.

***** FINAL REVISED PAPERS DUE at NOON on Dec. 15 (W)**