University of Denver
Digital Humanities Institute
2012 Report

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Black Mariner Database

- *In which ways did your experience at DU support your project's research and development?*

    The week at Denver's Digital Humanities Institute helped me in two significant ways. First, for someone who is not tech savvy, the program helped me conceptualize my project in a more dynamic way. Not only do I now focus on the obtaining of data and thinking of how it can be employed in my own research, but I've become more prone, and adept, at thinking of how others will want to employ the *BMD*. The second major affect on my work that the DU program has had was providing me with basic visualization language and pushing me to consider how visual depiction can be as effective (if not much more effective) than text. This has reshaped my scholarship so that when I talk of "transition zones" in the Atlantic where black mariners found and lost freedom, my first instinct is to consider how to provide visual depictions of such zones.

- *Which aspects / components of your project have you addressed or implemented since your visit to DU?*

    Since June, 2011 three of my main focuses for this project have been to (1) integrate all of the existing research I have done into the *BMD,* (2) to create individual *Filemaker Pro* files for each of the mariners in the database, and (3) to expand the data fields in the *Filemaker Pro* files. Integration of existing research has resulted in the *BMD* expanding from 17,500 to 20,167 black mariners. To date, 12,350 individual *Filemaker Pro* files have been created. And each *Filemaker Pro* file now has five additional data fields, bringing the total for each mariner to 53 data fields, or a total of more than one million data points, making the *BMD* one of the largest maritime databases.

    In order to begin to educate the public as to the benefits of the *BMD*, I have been working with members of Eastern Illinois University's Geography Department to create a series of GIS maps depicting where maritime fugitives fled from, where they fled to and the numbers of the maritime fugitives from each of the Atlantic ports for which I have data. (The creation of *Filemaker Pro* files has focused on maritime fugitives so that complete data sets for that sub-field could be created and used to create such GIS maps). These images have been incorporated in classroom instruction (American History survey courses, Colonial History seminars and graduate Atlantic World seminar), conference papers to be presented this summer at the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture ("OIEAHC") and the International Congress of Maritime History ("ICMH"), and an essay for the new *Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*.

I have worked with EIU's Geography Department to obtain Board of Trustee approval for a new GIScience Center. During AY 12-13, the *BMD* will be one of the GIScience Center's projects in which both Geography Department faculty, students, myself and several history students will develop GIS maps that depict individual sailors' maritime careers, maritime labor markets, and the kidnapping and re-enslavement of black mariners.

To assist students understand *BMD* and how it can serve as a research tool, I have created several *Wordle* classroom exercises by which students can employ the *BMD* to quickly depict larger concepts about the Black Atlantic.

To enable me to create a website for the *BMD*, I applied for a series of internal EIU funding grants, including the newly created Presidential Research Fund ("PRF"). Both monies obtained from the College of Arts and Humanities and the PRF, if granted (funding decisions will be made in late March), will enable me to hire students to complete this calendar year the creation of individual *Filemaker Pro* files for each of the 20,167 black seamen.

- *What do you plan to accomplish next with your project?*

A blog which I have developed using Wordpress discussing research issues concerning black mariners and the *BMD* will be launched in May. The timing of the blog's launch is to both ensure that all *Filemaker Pro* files have been created for all North American black mariners (which will the focus on initial blog entries) and to connect to the conference papers to be presented this summer at the OIEAHC and the ICMH. (The OIEAHC paper is specifically intended to be a public "coming out" presentation to the leading conference of Early Americanists of the *BMD* through a demonstration of how the *BMD* can be used to create micro-histories).

This summer I will be writing a series of essays for the *BMD* website and overseeing student completion of the *Filemaker Pro* files.

In September I will be submitting applications for NEH and ACLS Digital Innovation grants to fund the creation of the website for the *BMD*.