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Our-Story Strolls

In Our-Story Strolls, in opposite to the his-stories written by accursed predominantly patriarchal narratives of colonizers and hate-mongers, we will look at the traces of true owners of The Turtle Island. We will also assess today’s reality, for the history of oppression continues, morphs, and lives around us, e.g., through systemic racism.

Part 1:**Things Get Better**

Inspired by my Instructor’s idea of going an extra mile and providing ‘bonus’ materials, I decided to go 530 miles between Urbana, IL to **St. Ignace, MI**. It was also a true bonus for the time of Covid-19, as being used to always being on the move leading a sedentary lifestyle since March was a bit detrimental task. Of course, also a good lesson to appreciate everyone and everything around, but this is why we have travels to appreciate all of that even more, when we return home.

Thus, in the midst of surrounding gloominess, a trip to The Upper Peninsula — Michigan — brought a lot of hope, also in terms of humanity/ies. In this course, we looked at the [Genoa Indian School Digital Reconciliation Project](https://genoaindianschool.org/), and as every land in the US, Upper Peninsula has also belonged to Native people and was shed with tears of their physical and cultural annihilation.

When entering the town of St. Ignace, one could see immediately where to go — the ‘old way’ of dealing with ‘Indians’ by showcasing to the tourist ‘Indian village’, with furs, plumes, and half-naked muscular chief. Such places do not bother to tell us about a particular group of people whose land we are standing on, about their story and culture; what matter is to fit the scenography from western films and each and every stereotype.

But here comes the **hope** — on the other side of the road, there was a model-day [museum](https://www.museumofojibwaculture.net/index.html) focusing on **Ojibwa Culture** heritage with respect and due-diligence showcasing culture and history and respective artifacts. The latter place is evidence that things get better and improve in contrast to the accursed past if only a few active and determined citizens decide to make a difference.

Acknowledging the land and its belonging to  
Native Communities  
not only gives respect but justice  
and bothers the white supremacists the most.

Part 2:  
On Justice *and Our-story*

The Cahokia Mounds, “[the remains of the most sophisticated prehistoric Native Civilization north of Mexico](https://cahokiamounds.org/about/).”

\*Thanks Keshia for sharing the [Native Land](https://native-land.ca/) tool that was very helpful in determining the information below!

While living on Turtle Island (Snyder, 1995), I always end up in bittersweet places of magic and tragic hues connecting the present and the past (“NativeLand.Ca,” n.d.). First, it was New Mexico, where Anasazi, Pueblo, and Jicarilla Apache cultures lived on that land and created such astonishing places as Chaco or Taos. Then, I moved to Upstate New York, studying near Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne (Mohawk, Haudenosaunee, St. Lawrence Iroquoians). Now, living in Nebraska on the land of Ochethi Sakowin, Oto and Pawnee, I also travel a lot to Urbana, Illinois (Ochethi Sakowin Myaamia, Peoria, and Kickapoo), which is the location of my Digital Humanities (DH) project documenting the pandemic.

What we do with this exercise is not only about paying respect to nations and cultures inhabiting this very land before us. It is also about justice, as Roopika Risam and her colleagues remind us in their [posts](http://criticaldh.roopikarisam.com/) (Risam et al., n.d.). Why? Let me give you an example. I like to say that Poland used to be a melting pot before the US. In fact, it is not far from reality as we were the land welcoming refugees from other places of Europe, e.g., The Statute of Kalisz of 1264 (Polin, n.d.) welcoming Jewish refugees (of course, it does not mean that everything in the past was ‘hunky-dory’). After the Second World War, we became a [homogenous nation](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html) of more than 90% of people looking the same or going to the same church (World Factbook, n.d.); and, at the time of totalitarian rule, almost thinking the same. Yet, even then, Michael Foucault could seek his refuge in Poland for his sexuality (Krakus and Vatulescu, 2019). In 2015, with coming to power of populist government, we became a country unwelcoming, first to [refugees and Muslims](https://www.brookings.edu/research/imaginary-muslims-how-polands-populists-frame-islam/) (Dudzińska and Kotnarowski, 2019), then to LGBTQI+ individuals with de facto [established LGBTQI+ ‘free zones’](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/10/world/lgbt-free-poland-intl-scli-cnnphotos/) covering 1/3 of the country (Picheta and Kottasová, 2020), or to [women rights](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/world/europe/poland-tribunal-abortions.html) (Pronczuk, 2020). The ruling party also has its take on history by seeing Poland in the past and now, as a country of ethnic Poles, Catholics, and whites. This is not congruent with what I told you about the ‘melting pot’. For that reason, pluralistic history is so important. Acknowledging the land and its belonging to native communities not only gives respect but justice and bothers the white supremacists the most.

My DH publications originate in strolls around Urbana. The place located 100 miles away from [Dickson Mounds](http://www.illinoisstatemuseum.org/content/welcome-dickson-mounds), 170 miles away from [Cahokia Mounds](https://cahokiamounds.org/), and 200 miles from markers of the [Trail of Tears](https://www.nps.gov/trte/index.htm). However, the power of Keshia’s tool is that it shows that it is not about landmarks and markers ‘graciously’ protected/placed by the state that grabbed the entirety of Turtle Island. This is about the realization of very justice that the entirety of our mere presence in the US vanquishes the existence of Turtle Island. The real justice is to see the Turtle Islands here and everywhere around us.

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**Mileage**was calculated by: “Google Maps.” Accessed October 22, 2020.<https://www.google.com/maps>.

Part 3:  
Filling the Lacuna of Knowledge:   
BLM in Twin Cities

I am grateful for an opportunity to research about **Black Lives Matter (BLM)**.

One of my professors recently said that when the family asks him about something, they need to wait at least two years to find out the answer while he does scholarly work. I found that answer quite troubling, as, in these two years, certain ‘**knowledge**lacuna’ will be created. And, lacunas rarely stay empty. They get occupied by people like Steve Bannon and/or polluted by fake news and quasi-‘science’.

Yet, that was not the end of being troubled—the search results on BLM yielded by university libraries (U of I) were quite ‘humbling’ along with the website of the local chapter in Urbana-Champaign, IL (U-C), inactive since 2018. Nota bene, that [website](https://blmcu.wordpress.com/) was powered by WordPress.

Perhaps, above are the reasons why there is so much misinformation about BLM, and it should not—because we speak, after all, about**the largest movement in US history**(Buchanan et al., 2020). Thus, I am even happier that this Digital Humanities (DH) project enables me to research BLM; so I can attempt to fill the knowledge lacuna before the ‘Banons’ come.

When scholarships lose its breath, there are still reminiscences of local journalism that keep the flow of oxygen of information coming, like in the twin cities we have (since 1919)—The [News-Gazette](https://www.news-gazette.com/) and with their help and other sources; I could determine the following:

In U-C, BLM’s presence, just as in other university towns, has been a graceful mélange of campus and local activism (Urbana.org, 2015). In June this year, we witness the largest protests in U-C history (News-Gazette, 2020a). But the BLM organizing in the heart of Illinois dates back to 2015 (two years after the onset of the Movement in 2013 from a ‘hashtag’, after the murder of Trayvon Martin on February 26th, 2012; Taylor, 2016) with its first chapter that was in operation till 2018 (BLMCU, n.d.).

The movement in twin cities received a lot of local support and no visible backlash. Among others, from the local Unitarian Universalist Church and average citizens placing support signs in backyards or apartment’s windows/balconies (UU Church, 2020). Though, a similar sign was forcefully removed from a local school by order of the Superintendent what brought (well-justified) outrage of local activists (News-Gazette, 2020a).

When paradigms shift, the outlook for BLM in our own communities is not the only acknowledgment of the need for an intersectional understanding of our very times (Crenshaw, 1989), but also for acknowledgment for this momentous movement and unprecedented momentum in current American society as well as the “[case [in point] for the black digital humanities](https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/fa10e2e1-0c3d-4519-a958-d823aac989eb)” (Gallon, 2016).

Furthermore, this assignment reminded me of one UNL encounters this semester after filling a survey administered by Political Science Department, a student wrote to me that he ‘hopes’ we do not support BLM (sic!) —a sad example of yet another white male misinformed individual alas not seeking information but conflict. Definitely a profile that does not fit a university student. Nevertheless, I would like to acknowledge that our scholarly endeavors in recognizing BLM  are only a mere attempt to grasp immense daily discrimination of being … “While Black” what so well encapsulates in his book Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015). At least, what we can do is to help the lacuna not to be filled with misinformation that contributes to misinterpretation of BLM and mistreatment of people what makes this DH project of high importance.

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