Troubleshooting Maps

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When working with geospatial data, there are two major pieces of information which contribute to a successful representation of the place you wish to represent on a map. The first step when troubleshooting maps, is to ensure that these two types of information are accurate and include minimal errors before moving on to addressing potential problems with the platform or tool itself.

The first is a map with georeferencing data made available. Georeferencing data is what transforms the image of a map into a map which has geographic locations attached to it and can actually be used by the computer as a functional map. For example, an image of a historical map of Boston cannot be successfully used by a computer as a map because the computer does not recognize the difference between that image and, say, an image of a rock. However, an image of a historical map of Boston where x and y coordinates are marked out on the image and those coordinates indicate points of interest is a more data-rich object than the image of a rock. If you are using a platform such as Knight Lab StoryMap, you don't need to worry about finding a map with georeferencing data—the platform takes care of it for you. However, if you were to use a more advanced mapping platform such as ArcGIS, you might explore other types of maps (as well as other types of images you can treat like maps) using georeferencing.

The second is accurate latitude and longitude data. When working with modern locations, latitude and longitude may often be substituted for the full address of the location (though it is key to be as specific as possible with the address), as is the case with a platform such as StoryMap. However, when working with locations which no longer exist, it may be more reliable to instead use the latitude and longitude of a historical location in order to get as accurate of a modern location as possible. It is important to make sure that you have the latitude and longitude information correct, however, to ensure that you don't accidentally plot points intended for North America in Europe and vice versa

Locational Data Troubleshooting Checklist:

- ☐ If you have uploaded your own map to the platform, is the map georeferenced or just a picture of a map?
- ☐ If you are providing addresses instead of latitude and longitude, are these addresses specific or do they give a vague location. For example, "Boston, MA" versus "360 Huntington Ave, Boston, MA 02115" — the more specific address is going to give you less problems than the vague address
- ☐ Does the address actually exist?
- ☐ If you are working with historical locations, can you generate the latitude and longitude data? Similarly, can you generate an address using the latitude and longitude if the platform requires an address?
- ☐ Have you accidentally swapped the latitude and longitude for each other? Similarly, are you missing the negative modifier ("-") in front of either number?

Once you have sorted out any potential issues with the map and data itself, any further problems you will run into on a mapping platform are likely going to involve design decisions you have made or an issue with the platform itself. Below is a checklist of design-related troubleshooting solutions that may help guide you through fixing any addition errors you run into

Design Error Troubleshooting Checklist

- ☐ Ensure that the contrast between background colors and text colors is high enough that they are able to be seen clearly
- ☐ Avoid stacking locations on top of one another when possible to avoid confusion when viewing your map
- ☐ If you're unable to view images that you have copy and pasted into a platform like StoryMap, it is likely due to an issue with you internet connection — it is always more secure to download the image and upload it to the platform to ensure it loads properly with the map
- ☐ StoryMap does not save your progress as you work, if you find your design choices disappearing, make sure that you are saving your work before exiting the tab

Platform Error Troubleshooting Checklist

☐ Is the platform scheduled to be offline when you're planning to work? Otherwise, is the platform currently experiencing issues? Check their social media or other hubs where they make these announcements

☐ Try checking back at a later time and loading your map – are you experiencing the same issues? Similarly, try restarting your internet connection to see if you experience the same issues

☐ Does your map load on a mobile device? If so, the issue may be with your laptop rather than the platform—try restarting your computer