

# **Storytelling with Mapping: Knight Lab StoryMap**

---

DITI Consultants: Ayah Aboelela and Dipa Desai

GRMN 1102: Elementary German 2

Prof. Ruth Sondermann

Spring 2026

Digital Integration Teaching Initiative

*Feel free to ask questions at any point  
during the presentation!*

# Maps' different uses

Maps can convey all sorts of geospatial information that can facilitate different applications. How do you use maps?

- ? Navigational/orientational maps
- ? Geological/topographical maps
- ? Political maps
- ? Thematic maps
- ? Artistic maps
- ? Narrative maps

N

Northeastern University  
NULab for Digital Humanities and  
Computational Social Science



Subway Map from MBTA

Feel free to ask questions at any point  
during the presentation!

# Workshop Agenda

- ? Best practices and questions to consider before creating your StoryMap.
- ? Demonstrate steps for using Knight Lab's StoryMap.
- ? Start building!
- ? Slides and handouts available at <https://bit.ly/sp26-sondermann-grmn1102-storymap>
- ? For more information, please see: <https://bit.ly/handout-storymap>

# What is a StoryMap?

KnightLab's StoryMap tool allows users to tell narrative stories connected with specific geographic locations.

**Welcome to the Fenway**

Welcome to this Community Walk! The purpose of this walk is to introduce people to the history and context of one of the neighborhoods that surround Northeastern. Most importantly, this walk is designed using an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) perspective. ABCD is a philosophy that recognizes communities' abilities to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills, and lived experiences as well as existing resources and infrastructure.

Another way to think about it is to consider a community's strengths rather than its deficits, or problems.

For example, instead of saying, "This community has a high crime rate and it can't be fixed," we say, "This community has an organization that serves the previously incarcerated and is collaborating within the community to work towards neighborhood, but will beow those have been"

*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# What are the limits of maps?

- ❑ Maps reflect the intention of the map-maker and are **inherently limited**.
  - Maps produce **shared interpretations**, and are not expressions of objective spatial relations.
  - Boston is as much a human idea as a physical space, and thus maps both *represent* and *create* reality. See Quincy Langford's "[Maps Are a Tool to Understand the Past and Shape the Future](#)" to explore how maps can create, erase, and reshape.
- ❑ The **simplicity** and **clarity** of maps is deceiving, but **artificial clarity** is necessary for the map to be **useful**.

# Questions for critiquing maps

- ?
- What is its subject?
- ?
- Who is/are the map's audience(s)?
- ?
- What is its message, argument, or purpose?
- ?
- How and when was the map made?
- ?
- Who made this map? What choices did they make?

From ["Critiquing Maps II"](#), by Shannon Mattern

## The True Size of Africa

A small contribution in the fight against rampant *Immappancy*, by Kai Krause

In addition to the well known social issues of *illiteracy* and *lunacy*, we also should be such a concept as "*Immappancy*", meaning insufficiently geographical.

A survey with random American schoolkids let them guess the population and land area of their country. Not entirely unexpected, but still rather unsettling, the majority chose "7-2 billion" and "largest" in the survey. When asked to estimate the size of European college students, geographical estimates were often off by factors of 2-3. This survey was conducted in 2009, after a heated battle of the predominantly used mapping projections (such as Mercator).

A particularly extreme example is the worldwide misjudgment of the true size of Africa. Most people tend to guess to embody the massive scale, which is larger than the USA, China, India, Japan and all of Europe - combined!

COUNTRY	AREA (km²)
USA	9.629
China	9.573
India	3.287
Mexico	1.964
Peru	1.285
France	633
Spain	506
Papua New Guinea	462
Sweden	441
Japan	378
Germany	357
Norway	334
Italy	301
New Zealand	270
United Kingdom	243
Nepal	147
Bangladesh	144
Greece	132
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30.102</b>
<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>30.221</b>
Just for Reference: The Surface of the MOON	37.898

Please note:

The graphical layout of this map is meant purely as a visualization to illustrate the fact Africa is much larger than almost everyone assumed. Even though it is a good visualization, it is not a map. To make that point, however, the table at the very bottom is very accurate. citoig  
[www.mapsoftheworld.com/areas\\_and\\_sizes.htm#Africa](http://www.mapsoftheworld.com/areas_and_sizes.htm#Africa)

Note for evidence that the figures in the table for Africa alone are probably not accurate: the following countries are included in the table, as are a handful of other entities (such as Monaco and Swaziland):

The reason for this is that the map purposely uses the similar shape, color and size of the countries in Africa. A more accurate map, using geographically exact depiction, using equal-area scaling, would be even more visually misleading. It would be a map that is visually accurate, but with many known outliers and proportions to tell the story, even if this conservative size has left-out parts of Africa.

The reason for this is that the map purposely uses the similar shape, color and size of the countries in Africa. A more accurate map, using geographically exact depiction, using equal-area scaling, would be even more visually misleading. It would be a map that is visually accurate, but with many known outliers and proportions to tell the story, even if this conservative size has left-out parts of Africa.

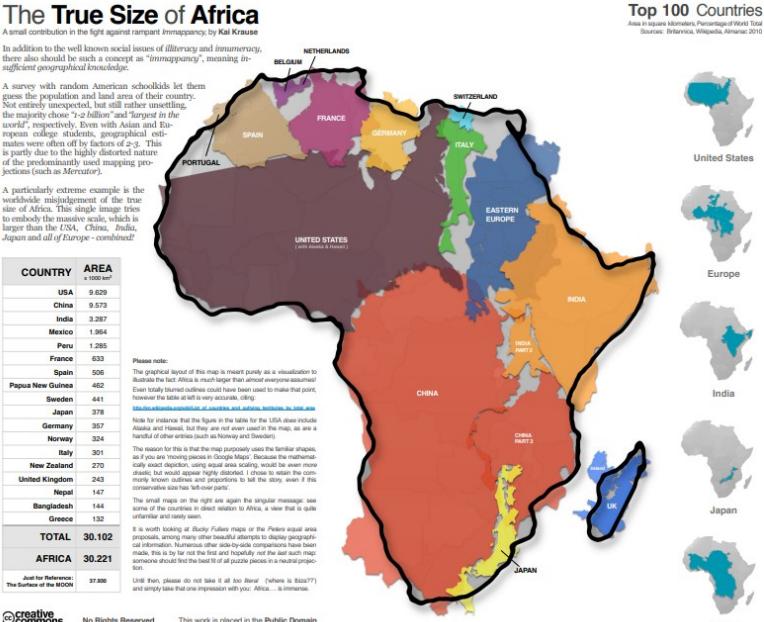
For those who are again the singular message: see some of the countries in direct relation to Africa, a view that is quite unfamiliar and rarely seen. In the same way, the Ptolemy equal-area proposals, among many other beautiful attempts to display geographical information. However, other side-by-side comparisons have been made, and the results are always the same: the map is a lie. And if anyone, someone should find the best fit of all puzzle pieces in a jigsaw project.

Until then, please do not take it all too *seriou*! ("where is this??") and simply take that one impression with you. Africa... is immense.



No Rights Reserved

This work is placed in the Public Domain



[The True Size of Africa](#), Kai Krause

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

# Why use a map to tell stories?

- ❑ StoryMaps help us **render visualized, spatialized, and contextual information about spaces** in the past or today.
  - StoryMaps can be about places you've never been to. The goal is to help users “see” the spaces/places/routes as accurately as possible, and to get a sense of the people and things in the environment.
- ❑ Think about StoryMaps as **giving directions**, relating not only direction and **distance** but also **sequence**.

# Example Projects Using Maps to Tell Stories

- ② “[The Black Jazz Heritage Trail of Boston](#)”: uses a mix of textual, image, and student-researched location data to map historic Black jazz clubs.
- ② “[Mapping Shared Spaces: A Visual History of Boston's Black and Jewish Communities](#)”: presents the story of migration of Boston religious communities by following the changing locations of places of worship.
- ② “[Contemporary Indigenous Spatiality](#)”: created by Agléška Cohen-Rencountre (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) to interrogate settler-colonial epistemologies about water-ways, as well as trace personal and community connections to Rapid Creek and the Mississippi River.

# Making a StoryMap

*Feel free to ask questions at any point  
during the presentation!*

# StoryMap Best Practices

- ❑ Think carefully about the **audience** you are trying to reach with your map. This will impact your language, the order of your points, and the media that you choose.
- ❑ Think also about the **tone** of the map: the default for StoryMap can be very upbeat and informal, and that may not match the content you are sharing.
- ❑ **Test your map** after you have created it, to make sure that all the narrative points flow and that the language is clear and concise.

# Optional: Spreadsheet Template

Make a copy of the StoryMap template below and use it to fill in the different sites you want to map, images you want to include, etc.

## StoryMap Spreadsheet Template

Template based on the StoryMap Spreadsheet Template created by Molly Brown, Reference and Outreach Archivist, Northeastern University Library.

For more information about collecting and organizing data for StoryMap, please see:

<https://bit.ly/handout-storymap-spreadsheet>

# Data collection: Site

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Slide #	Site Name	Site Location	Image URL/File Location	Image Credit	Image Caption	Headline	Historical Profile/First Person Narrative	Citation(s)	Additional Media	Additional Media Caption & Credit
2	Title Slide	n/a	n/a	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections		Walking the Emerald Necklace				
3	Site 1	Back Bay Fens Community Gardens	42.344888, -71.093221	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Community garden in Back Bay Fens.	Back Bay Community Gardens	This is an introduction to the project that will continue on.  Two men tend community garden in the Back Bay Fens. A public water building can be seen on the left. The Back Bay Fens (also called The Fens, or Fens) is a freshwater marsh and lagoon area within Boston's larger Emerald Necklace park system.			
4											
5											
6											

The slide number can serve as the order in which your sites appear on your map and the site name can be used to label sites on your map.

The site location is used to identify a point on your map where the site is physically located (address or coordinates).

# Data collection: Image

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Slide #	Site Name	Site Location	Image URL/File Location	Image Credit	Image Caption	Headline	Historical Profile/First Person Narrative	Citation(s)	Additional Media	Additional Media Caption & Credit
2	Title Slide	n/a	n/a	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections		Walking the Emerald Necklace				
3	Site 1	Back Bay Fens Community Gardens	42.344888, -71.093221	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Community garden in Back Bay Fens.	Back Bay Community Gardens	This is an introduction to the project that will continue on.  Two men tend community garden in the Back Bay Fens. A public water building can be seen on the left. The Back Bay Fens (also called The Fens, or Fens) is a freshwater marsh and lagoon area within Boston's larger Emerald Necklace park system.			
4											
5											
6											

The image URL/File location is useful in keeping track of images of sites. Always credit your images to indicate their origin. Also include a caption describing your image.

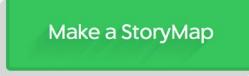
# Data collection: Narrative and Sources

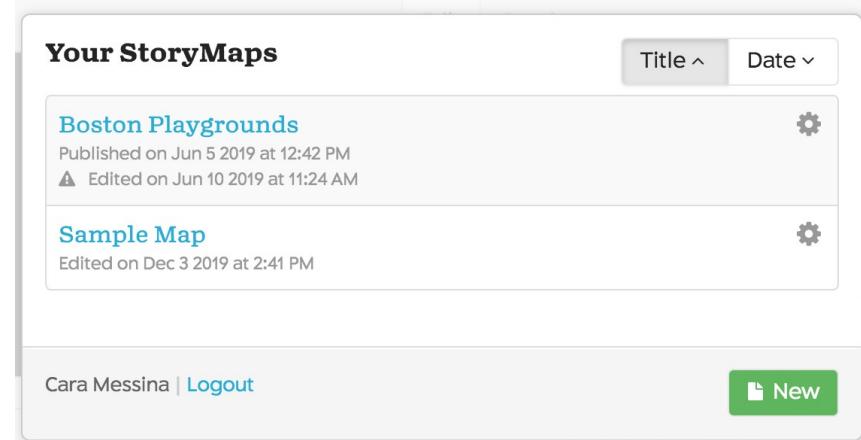
fx	http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126											
1	Slide #	Site Name	Site Location	Image URL/File Location	Image Credit	Image Caption	Headline	Historical Profile/First Person Narrative	Citation(s)	Additional Media	Additional Media Caption & Credit	
2	Title Slide	n/a	n/a	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Back Bay Fens, Boston, Mass.	Walking the Emerald Necklace	This is an introduction to the project that will continue on. Two men tend community garden in the Back Bay Fens. A public water building can be seen on the left. The Back Bay Fens (also called The Fens, or Fens) is a freshwater marsh and lagoon area within Boston's larger Emerald Necklace park system.				
3	Site 1	Back Bay Fens Community Gardens	42.344888, -71.093221	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Community garden in Back Bay Fens.	Back Bay Community Gardens					
4												
5												
6												

The headline can serve as the official title or label of your site. Including a narrative provides more context as to why your site is important.

Don't forget to cite your sources! Also, you may want to include additional media related to your site (e.g. newspaper clippings, additional photos, etc.).

# Create a StoryMap

- ② Go to <https://storymap.knightlab.com/>
- ② Click “Make a StoryMap.” 
- ② Either create a new account or sign in through Google.
- ② Once you’re signed in,  
click “New Map” (once you have  
created your map, it will be there  
for you to work on).
- ② Name your project.



The screenshot shows the 'Your StoryMaps' dashboard. At the top right are 'Title ^' and 'Date ^' dropdown menus. Below them is a list of maps:

- Boston Playgrounds**  
Published on Jun 5 2019 at 12:42 PM  
▲ Edited on Jun 10 2019 at 11:24 AM
- Sample Map**  
Edited on Dec 3 2019 at 2:41 PM

At the bottom left is the user name 'Cara Messina | Logout'. On the bottom right is a green 'New' button with a document icon.

# Your StoryMap

This is your title slide. The title slide shows all points from your other slides.

Overall options (like changing map layout)

Address search geocoding generously sponsored by Mapbox.

Media

No Media Selected

URL to your media  
or

Credit

Caption

HEADLINE

B I </> %

Marker Options Background Options

**SAVE  
OFTEN!**

# Your StoryMap: Slides

The screenshot shows the StoryMap JS interface. At the top, there are navigation buttons: 'My Maps', 'Options', 'Save', 'Publish Changes', 'Edit', and 'Preview'. A blue box highlights the 'Preview' button. Below it, a message says, 'This is your title slide. The title slide shows all points from your other slides.' The main area features a world map with many red dots representing geographic points. On the left, a sidebar has a red header '(untitled)' with a red square icon, a blue 'Add Slide' button, and a 'Lumines' logo. At the bottom, there's a 'Media' section with fields for 'URL to your media', 'Upload an Image', 'Credit', and 'Caption'. To the right, there's a 'HEADLINE' editor with a rich text toolbar and a text input field. A blue line connects the 'Add Slide' button to the 'Check out and add new slides here' callout, and another blue line connects the 'Preview' button to the 'Preview your slides' callout.

Check out and add new slides here

Preview your slides

Address search geocoding generously sponsored by Mapbox.

Media

URL to your media  
or

Credit  
Caption

Accepts [HTML](#)

Marker Options Background

HEADLINE

B I </> %

Preview your slides

Preview the geographic points in all of your slides

# Your StoryMap: Media and Text Boxes

The screenshot shows a StoryMap interface with a world map background. Three orange text boxes are overlaid on the map, each containing text. A blue line points from the leftmost text box to a media upload panel at the bottom left. Another blue line points from the middle text box to a 'Background Options' button at the bottom right. A third blue line points from the rightmost text box to its background color.

This is your title slide. The title slide shows all points from your other slides.

Uploading photos or other media! Document what you upload

Title and content of your text box

Color or image for text box background

Media

URL to your media  
or

No Media Selected

Credit

Caption

Accepts [HTML](#)

Marker Options

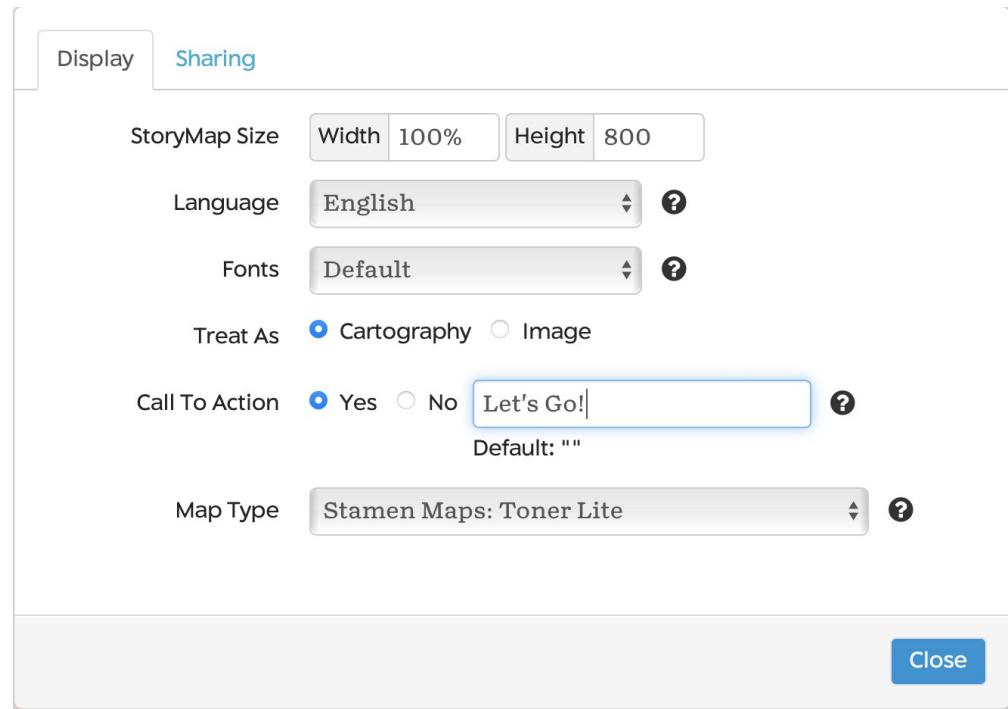
Background Options

HEADLINE

B I </> %

# Options for designing your map

- ❑ The “Options” button in the top left allows you to change the design of your map.
- ❑ Customizable options include Language, Fonts, Call to Action, Map Type and more.



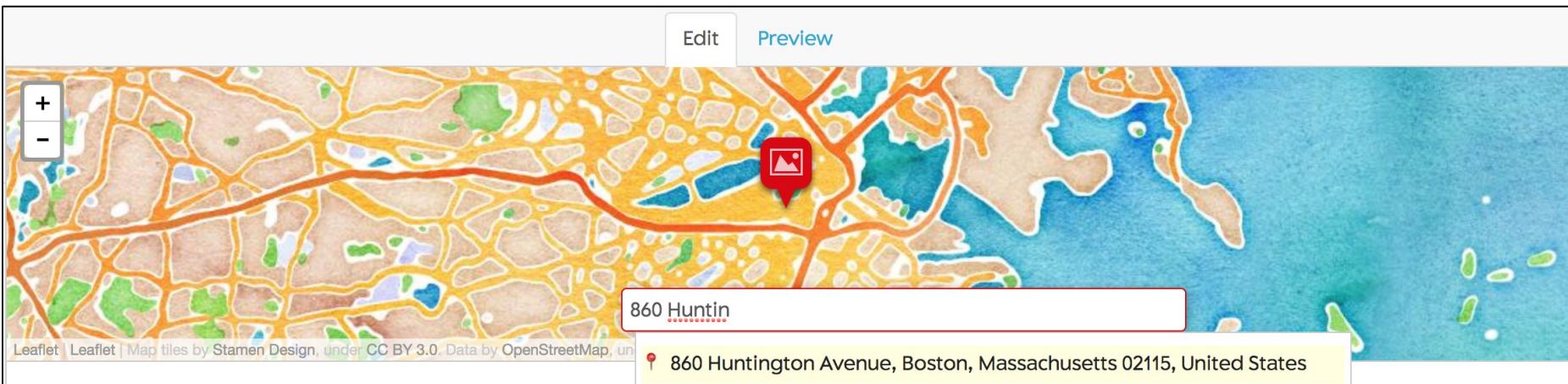
*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# Slides, or map markers

Each slide is a different marker point on your map. Each slide contains:

- ❑ Title and text. The text box reads basic HTML.
- ❑ A background image or color.
- ❑ A map marker, which can be placed by searching for Google Maps locations or by placing the marker manually.
- ❑ Media: images, videos, and sound files can be uploaded. Since only *one* media file can be uploaded per slide, you can use the text box's HTML to integrate additional images or other media types.

# Add A Location



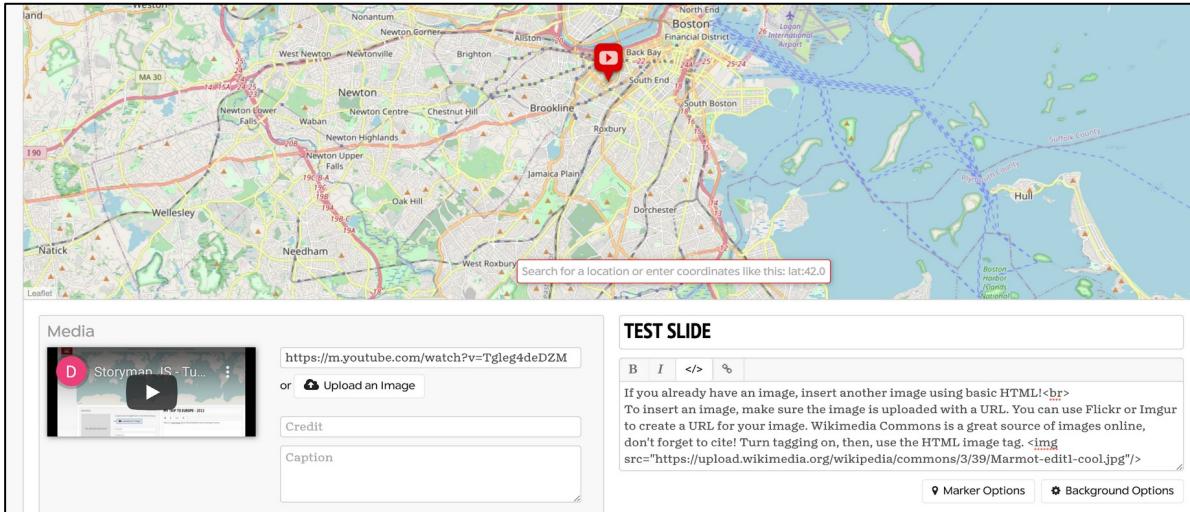
KnightLab StoryMap uses **Mapbox** to locate addresses

StoryMap, however, does **not** always recognize place names; you might need to know the **address** or location of particular structures

You can also **drag and drop the map markers** to the specific location

*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# Add Media and Images to a Slide: Upload or URL



Use “media” to upload files. You can upload an image or put a **URL** of an image OR a video (like a YouTube video). If you want to include your own video, you will first have to upload it to YouTube or other online publisher and copy that link.

# A Note on HTML

- ? You can use HTML to have more control over the display and behavior of StoryMap. Look for the “Accepts HTML” language or this symbol: </>
- ? For more information on HTML, please see: <https://bit.ly/handout-HTML>

## Helpful HTML Codes

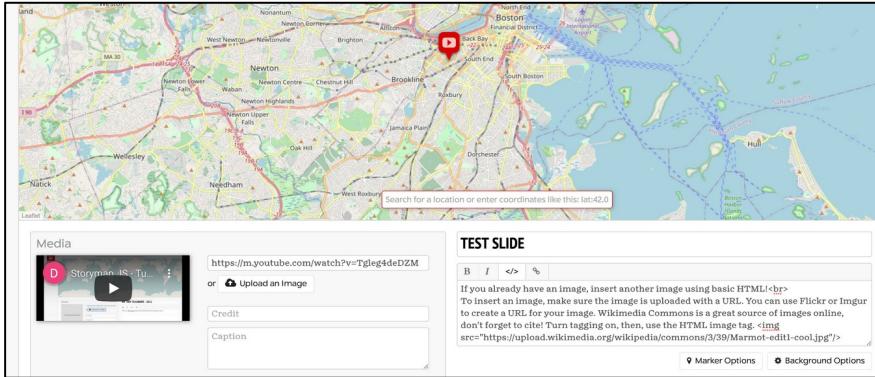
#Change Text Color  
<span style ="color:red">YOUR TEXT HERE</span>

#Add Link in Caption/Credit  
<a href="URL">text</a>

#Add Image/Media in Textbox  


#Add Alternate Text to Image/Media  


# Add Media and Images to a Slide:HTML

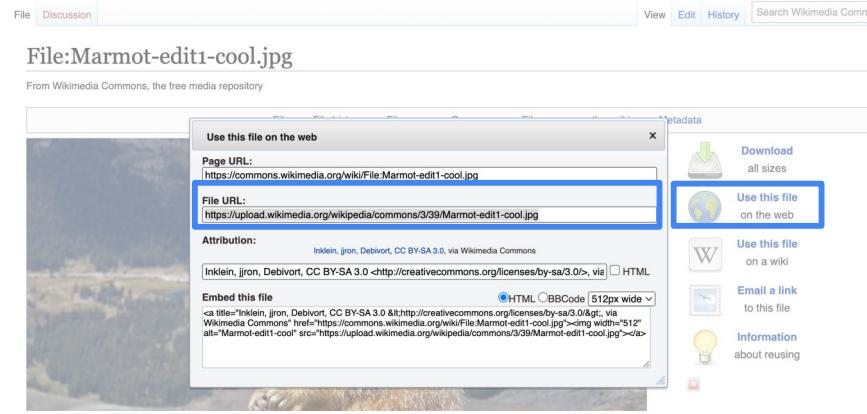


If you have an image or a video in the “media” section, but want to include an image **in the text**, you can! The text box reads basic HTML.

1. Click the </> button (turn on HTML)
2. Get a URL of your image. Use Wikimedia Commons to search images by content, and filter by license type and image size. Make sure to use the embed file code, and don’t forget to cite the source!
3. Use the HTML  tag to insert the image.
4. Check the “Preview” to see the image. Smaller image sizes may appear as a thumbnail, so stick to larger image sizes and preview your end result!

# Embed codes and image files

If you are adding an image via its URL, make sure that you select the link with **the image file itself**, not just a page with the image on it.



For example, to add an image from Wikimedia Commons, follow these steps:

1. Go to "More Details" and choose "Use this file on the web," or just choose "Use this file on the web" if you see that option.
2. Copy the "File URL."

# Image sharing and permissions

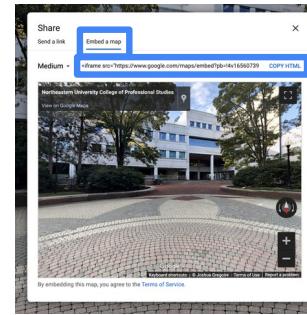
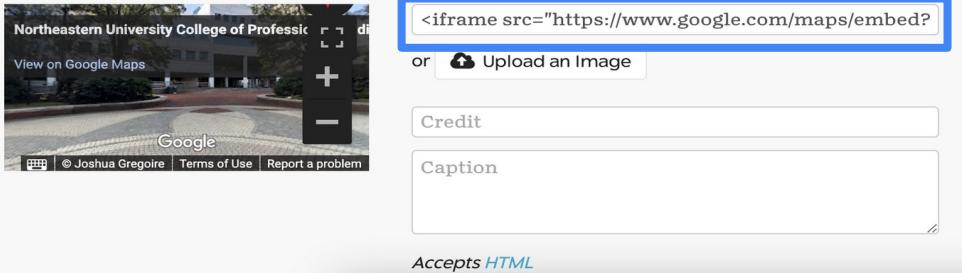
- ❑ It is important to verify that you are allowed to use images before you put them in your StoryMap.
  - ❑ Search for media that is public domain or shared with permissions that allow re-use.
    - DITI recommends [Wikimedia Commons](#) and DPLA ([Digital Public Library of America](#)).
  - ❑ Ensure proper credit/attribution is given for all media
- For more information on copyright and reuse, please see:
- <https://bit.ly/fair-use-handout>

# Add Google Street View to a Slide

As with other media, you can insert a Google street view map into a slide by entering its **URL**.

- Click “Share or embed image” from the menu in Google Maps, and copy the **HTML** link from the “Embed a map” tab.
  - Make sure the link has the `<iframe src="URL"></iframe>` code (it should automatically, but the map won’t work without it!).
- Enter the URL into the “URL to your media” box.

## Media



# StoryMap Demo

- ? To see StoryMap in action, click on this [Sample Map Link!](#)
- ? Here you will be able to explore a map custom-made by DITI to highlight your options for creating maps.

The screenshot shows a StoryMap interface. On the left is a map of Boston with various streets labeled and several musical note icons placed along specific routes or locations. On the right, there is a dark photograph of a concert stage with bright lights and silhouettes of audience members' hands raised. Below the photo is a section of text and a button.

Photo by Vishnu R. Nar, unsplash.com

## CONCERT VENUES IN BOSTON

On this slide, you can give an introduction to your map. You may want to provide background information, explain the map's significance, or point out things that you want your readers to notice.

To show emphasis, you can make text **bold** or *italicized*. Using the link button, you can direct your readers to outside sites.

And what about the button you see below? It comes with a default text, but you can change it through 'options' at the top-left of your screen.

[Let's Go!](#)

# Accessibility in StoryMap (1/3)

Alt-text is a description of a digital image attached to the image file. When you attach an image or video to your StoryMap, add descriptions of any images and videos in the image caption and text box. People that use screen readers are able to hear content you include in image captions and the text box.

**Headline**

B I </>

Place alt text describing the slide and attached visuals here

**Media**

 [iframe src="https://www.google.com/maps/embed?pb=!3](https://www.google.com/maps/embed?pb=!3)  
or  [Upload an Image](#)

Place image title and credit here

Place alt text describing the image here

Accepts HTML

# Accessibility in StoryMap (2/3)

Color contrast is one way to make StoryMap accessible. Choosing a higher color contrast palette will make the text more accessible. Avoid using red and green colors for differentiation. StoryMap allows users to customize text color using HTML and the slide background color.

**Headline**

B I </> %

```
<span style="color:red">Slide Text: Place alt text describing the slide and attached visuals here</span>
```

Media



`<iframe src="https://www.google.com/maps/embed?pb=...>`

or

Image Credit

```
<span style="color:red">Image Caption: Place alt text describing the image here</span>
```

Accepts HTML

---

**Slide Background**

**Background Color**



#ffffff

**Background Image**

or upload an image to your StoryMap folder.

# Accessibility in StoryMap (3/3)

If linking media in the text box of a slide on StoryMap, be sure to use a descriptive link name. Descriptive link names allows users to know the content and context of the link before they navigate it.

Instead of writing “For more information on accessibility in StoryMap, click [here](#).“

Write “For more information on accessibility in StoryMap, please see:  
**Handout: Accessibility in StoryMap.**”

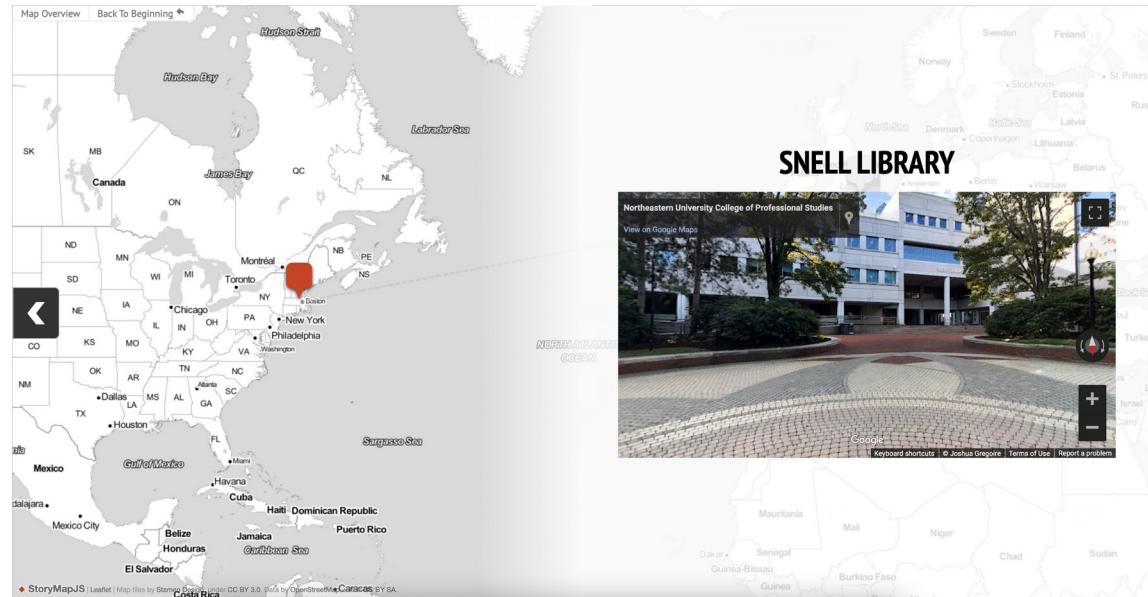
# A Note on Save States

StoryMap does not keep older versions of your project, so once you make and save changes, **you cannot retrieve a previous version.** You can also write over new content if you have your StoryMap open in multiple browser tabs or windows at once.

This is one reason why it is a good idea to plan out your StoryMap in a separate document: if you lose progress, you will have your content saved somewhere else.

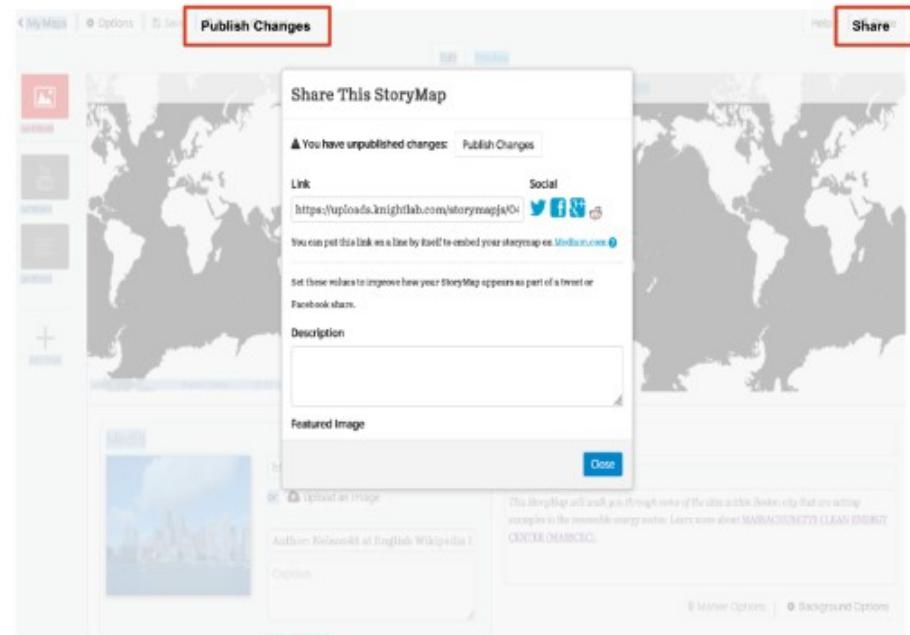
# A Note on Zoom Levels

StoryMap does not let you set how far zoomed in or out your slides will be. The zoom level is determined automatically according to the distance between your locations.



# Publish and Share Your StoryMap

- ?] Click the “Publish Changes” button on the top left side on the editing page.
- ?] StoryMap’s “Share” button is in the top right corner.
- ?] You can add a description and feature image here before sharing your StoryMap widely.



# Hands-On Demo: Black Heritage Trail

Identify your hands-on practice and troubleshooting needs—this practice time should work for you!

1. Select the **handout “Black Heritage Trail [demo]”** and **create a new map.**
2. Practice setting up **map markers.**
3. Practice adding **video or images** to your markers.
4. Try using **HTML** to embed an image to your map.

# For Further Exploration

[Handout: StoryMap](#)

[Handout: StoryMap Data Gathering Spreadsheet](#)

[Handout: Copyright and Fair Use](#)

[Handout: StoryMap and Accessibility](#)

[Handout: HTML Basics](#)

# Thank you!

—Taught by Dipa Desai and Ayah Aboelela

—Developed by Claire Lavarreda, Ana Abraham, Chris McNulty, and Benjamin Grey

- ❑ Slides and handouts available at <https://bit.ly/sp26-sondermann-grmn110-2-storymap>
- ❑ For more information on DITI, please see: <https://bit.ly/diti-about>
- ❑ Schedule an appointment with us! <https://bit.ly/diti-meeting>
- ❑ If you have any questions, contact us at: [nulab.info@gmail.com](mailto:nulab.info@gmail.com)
- ❑ We'd love your feedback! Please fill out a short survey here: <https://bit.ly/diti-feedback>