

# Introduction to Digital Exhibits

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Digital Integration Teaching Initiative

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African-American Literature

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Northeastern University  
*NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks*

# Workshop Agenda

- Introduction to Digital Exhibits
- EBBDA and Examples of Digital Exhibits
  - Archival exhibits in WordPress
  - Mapping Exhibits
  - Other creative examples
- Archival Silences
- Exhibit Audiences

For more information, please see: <https://bit.ly/Aljoe-Websitebuilding>



# What are Digital Exhibits?

- **Exhibits:** created to showcase archival items or collections, to tell a story or narrative, or convey a specific message. Materials are accompanied by interpretive text.
- **Digital exhibits** are curated digital items based around a narrative or topic
  - Digital exhibits can be thought of as taking an exhibit one might see in a museum and putting it online, but they typically go **beyond traditional museum methods** to utilize technology and digital humanities methods (i.e. utilize a digital mapping tool)



# What can digital exhibits offer?

- Bring together **multiple archival collections** from different places
  - Traditional museums usually display items only from their collection, but digital exhibits can collect items in many different collections
- Based around user **interaction** and engagement
- Replicate the **coherence** of a traditional exhibit, or they **subvert** the narrative of a exhibit through technology
- Increase **accessibility** of exhibits for a wider audiences



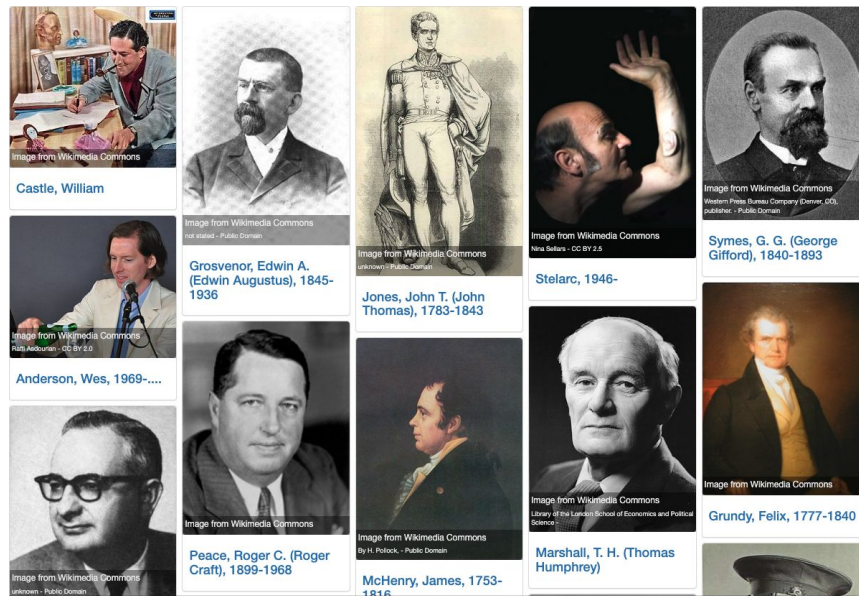
# Archival Silence and Digital Exhibits



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# Representation in digital archives

- [SNAC](#) (Social Networks and Archival Context) is an online resource that compiles historical information.
- Click on the link above to explore SNAC and try refreshing the page a few times. What do you observe about the kinds of people who appear each time you reload the page?



[SNAC](#)



# What are archival silences?

- Archives are created and maintained through **power and politics**, based on decisions about who, what, or why certain items are included in an archives and how items are displayed
- Through the promotion of certain histories and narratives, archives can **silence** certain people and stories often based on their identity
  - In the United States, the history of enslaved people has been at the center of debates about archival silencing
- **Representation itself** does not always equate to voice, how people are represented and in what medium also emerges as a way of silence



# How have scholars confronted archival silences?

- Reading information in a **critical way**, questioning and reconsidering the narratives produced by archives and the ideas behind them
- Two theories of archival silence:
  - **Reading against the grain**, taking historical documents and reinterpreting them from the perspective of marginalized historical figures, also known as bottom-up history
  - **Reading alongside or with the bias grain**, acknowledging the difficulty of separating archival documents from systems of power, and demonstrating how they further and explain systems of domination such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and imperialism





# How do archival silences function in digital exhibits?

- Technology can either **replicate silence** by disseminating information that enhances narratives of power
- Technology can **challenge silence** through disrupting the coherence of traditional narratives of history and literature
  - Challenge categories of history and who is included in them (See [Black Craftspeople Digital Archive](#))
  - Make connections within history and literature outside traditional narratives, (i.e. connecting the literature of Phillis Wheatley to Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade)
  - Making archival materials more accessible and open to the public

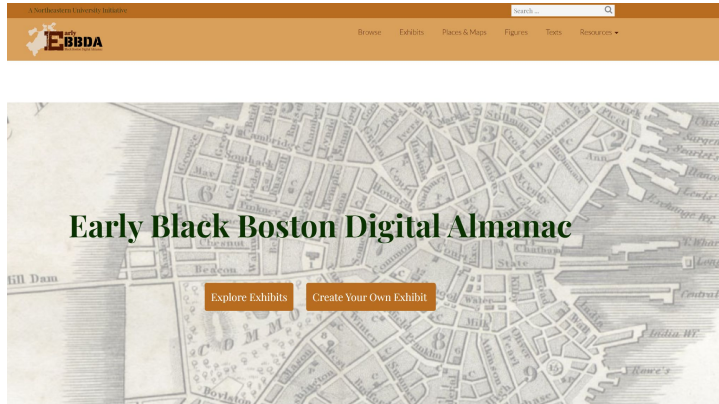


# EBBDA and Examples of Digital Exhibits



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# Early Black Boston Digital Almanac



“This collection of digital exhibits aims to communicate a more dynamic portrait of 18th and 19th century Black Boston in order to facilitate enhanced feelings of community in the city by providing a more inclusive story of Early Boston by highlighting its diversity throughout history. And finally, we hope to offer more opportunities to pursue and illuminate various connections between the 18/19c century and the 21st.”

- An example of a collection of digital exhibits, many made by Northeastern undergraduate students, to highlight, engage with, and demonstrate the vibrant history of Black communities in Boston during the 18th and 19th centuries
- For an audience of high school classes and students in Boston



# Tools for Creating Digital Exhibits

- **WordPress**, a website builder that allows easy integration of text and embedding of images, maps, documents, and videos in a clear layout
- **Google My Maps**, an editable mapping program based off of Google Maps where user can plot and connect points, and include images and context around geographic sites
- **Knight Lab StoryMap**, a mapping program that links sites together in a narrative fashion and links documents and images to locations
- **ArcGis**, a more complex mapping software that can mark locations and add multiple layers of data to maps



# Linear Digital Exhibits

Take a look at of the following example from EBBDA:

- [Mapping Phillis Wheatley](#)

Take a look **one** of the following examples:

- **Black Artists of Boston, [Napoleon Jones-Henderson](#),  
Created by Victoria Dey & Morgan Richards**
- [Set at Liberty](#), Created by Historic Beverly



# Discussion Questions

Based on the exhibits you looked at, consider the following:

- What type of narrative does these exhibits present?
- How are sources utilized in these exhibits?



# Non-Linear Digital Exhibits

Take a look at **one** of the following examples:

- [In the Same Boats](#), Created by Kaiama L. Glover and Alex Gil
- [Linked Jazz](#), Created by Pratt Institute of Library Science
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# Discussion Questions

Based on the exhibits you looked at, consider the following:

- How do these exhibits present narrative in a different type of way than the linear examples?
- Who is the audience for these exhibits and what is their role in engaging with the exhibits?





# Preparing Exhibits for an Audience



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# Thinking about audience for exhibits

- The first question to ask yourself when beginning an exhibit is **who is the audience?**
- The theme and narrative of the exhibit must match the audience
- Images, documents, and maps must be accessible for your audience and easily understandable
- Also important to ask yourself, **how much context does the audience need for this exhibit?**



# Tips for Exhibits for High School Students

- Include language and context accessible to high school students, but does not need to “talk down to” students
- Allow more interaction and exploration, such as through the navigation in StoryMaps, which will help increase the engagement of students
- Draw connections between the historical materiel and the present world or their lived experience
- Think about how the exhibit would fit into broader curriculum



# Discussion Questions

- Which of the examples is most effective? What elements would you want to incorporate in your project?
- How would you plan to think about archival silences as you build your digital exhibit?
- What are some barriers to learning that digital exhibits can help to overcome?



# Thank you!

Developed by: Hunter Moskowitz & Kasya O'Conner Grant

For more information see: <https://bit.ly/Aljoe-Websitebuilding>

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If you have any questions, contact us at [nulab.info@gmail.com](mailto:nulab.info@gmail.com)

Have questions? Schedule an appointment with us!

<https://bit.ly/diti-meeting>

