

Mapping Geospatial Data: Google My Maps

Developed by Colleen Nugent for
AFAM 2296 Early African American Literature
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Workshop Agenda

- Learn about Google My Maps as a mode of conveying data and content
- Discuss best practices and questions to consider before creating your map in Google My Maps
- Explore sample maps
- Outline steps for using Google My Maps
- Start building!

Slides, handouts, and data available at

<https://bit.ly/diti-fall2020-aljoe>



Workshop Objectives

- Articulate particular choices you will make when using a map to convey information
- Follow a step-by-step guide for creating, saving, and publishing maps using Google My Maps
- Upload data into Google My Maps, including location information, images, and text
- Navigate Google's map markers and location-finding system



What are different uses for maps?

- Maps are powerful tools for conveying geospatial information
- Well-made maps can quickly and easily give **content** and **context**, but poorly made maps can be misleading
- How do you use maps in your everyday life?
 - How does a subway map compare to a Google map?
 - What are these maps doing? How do they shape your expectations and experiences?



How do maps represent reality?

- Maps certainly reflect the intention of the map-maker, but maps are also *inherently limited*.
 - Boston is as much a human idea as a physical space, and thus maps both represent and *create* reality. [Laura Herbert, [“What Do Maps Really Do?”](#)]
 - The simplicity and clarity of maps is deceiving, and we should question it. But the artificial clarity is necessary for the map to be *useful*. Think of the maps that are useful to you: they filter out the information that is less relevant to what you’re using the map for.



Questions for critiquing maps

From Shannon Mattern, professor
of anthropology at The New School
(["Critiquing Maps II"](#)):

What's its subject?

**What is its "message" or
"argument" or purpose?**

How was the map made?

**What's its geographic/spatial
area?**

***When* is this map?**

**Who made this map? Editorial
choices?**

**Who is/are the map's
audiences?**

**What are the map's materiality
and form?**

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



Example Projects Using Google My Maps

- [“US National Parks”](#): uses a mix of textual, image, and geo-location data to provide content and context about US National Parks
- [“Freedom Trail Boston”](#): uses a mix of lines, geo-spatial points, texts, and images to map the route of the Freedom Trail in Boston
- [“Davis Square Somerville”](#): maps the businesses of Davis Square, using different icons to demonstrate various types of businesses



Activity: Explore Boston's Black Heritage Trail

Explore this sample map of [Boston's Black Heritage Trail](#). This map makes use of several Google My Maps features, including color coding, styling of icons and basemap, layers, points, lines, and polygons.

We will learn how to add these features to our own maps, including how to:

- Add and style points, lines, and polygons
- Add images, descriptions, and links
- Utilize layers and basemaps



Analysis of Examples

- Look through the examples, particularly the map of the Black Heritage Trail, and think about how they use geospatial layouts to present information.
- Make some notes about how you interacted with these maps.
- Can these techniques be applied to your own mapping goals?
- What worked best? What didn't work for you? What do you want to try on your own?



Create a map with Google My Maps

- Go to <https://www.google.com/mymaps>
- Sign in through Google
- Click “Create a New Map”
- Once you have created your map, it will be there for you to work on
- Name your project and give it a description



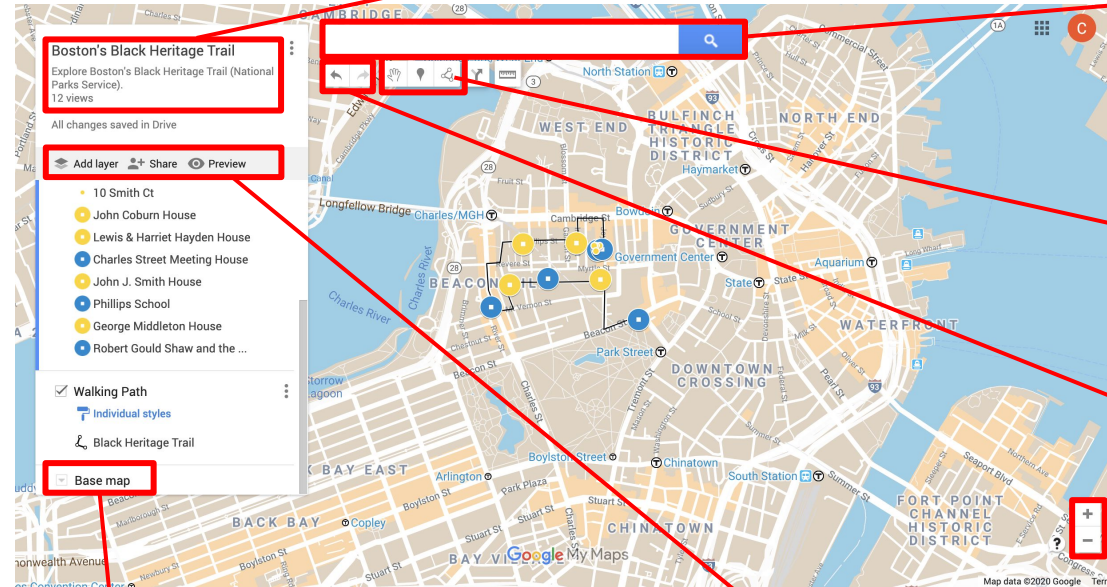
+ CREATE A NEW MAP



Google My Maps

Map title and map description

Search for locations using their addresses



Add and move points, lines, and polygons

Undo and redo

Zoom in and out

Change basemap

Add new layers and preview the finished product



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Selecting Your Basemap

To change your basemap, go to the bottom of the left-hand column and click “Base Map.” Google provides you with a variety of options to choose from.

Basemaps can help:

- Situate the map a particular context
- Make certain content easier or more difficult to read

What other impacts and implications can you think of?



Map Markers

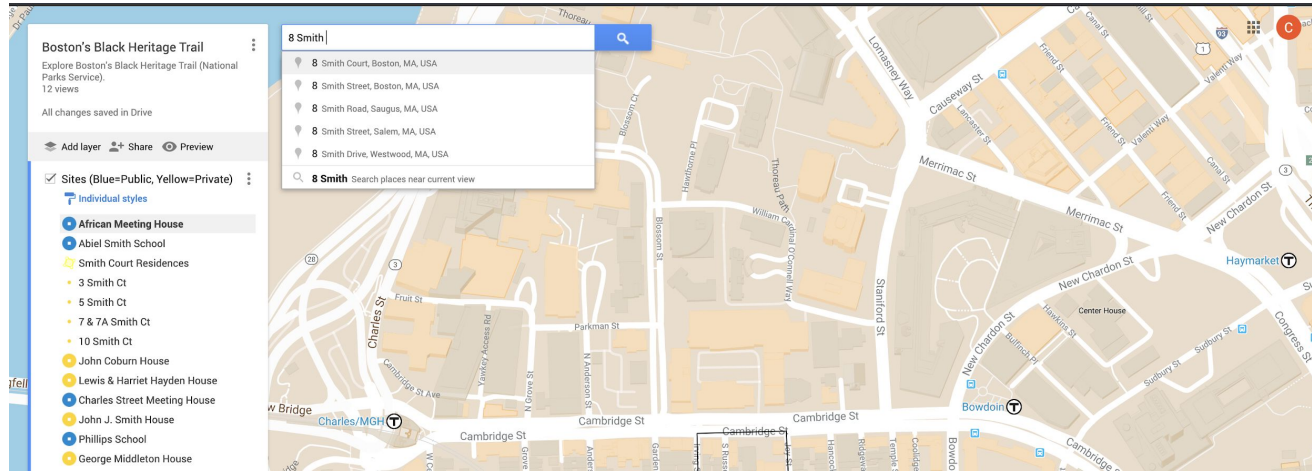
Map markers are the different points on your map. You can place markers using coordinates or addresses, or add them manually.

Each marker can contain:

- Name and description
- Street address
- Latitude/longitude geospatial coordinates
- Customizable icon and color
- Media: images, videos, and links



Add A Location



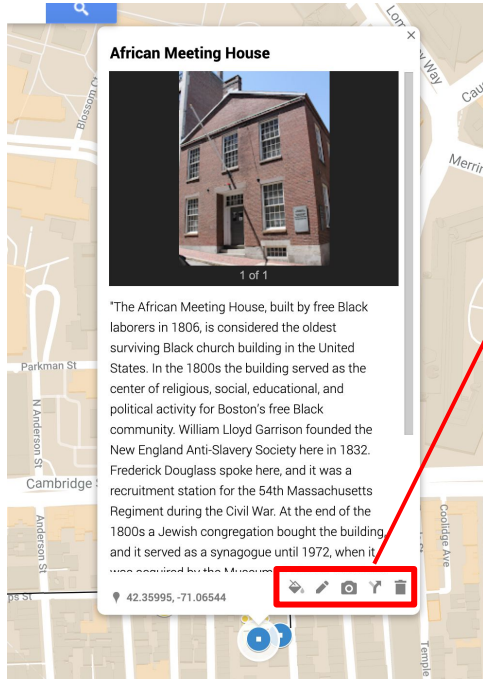
Search for the location you want and select "Add to Map."

Google My Maps does not always recognize place names; you might need to look up the address or location instead

If you cannot find the address for a location, you can select the marker icon and click on the spot where you wish to add the marker



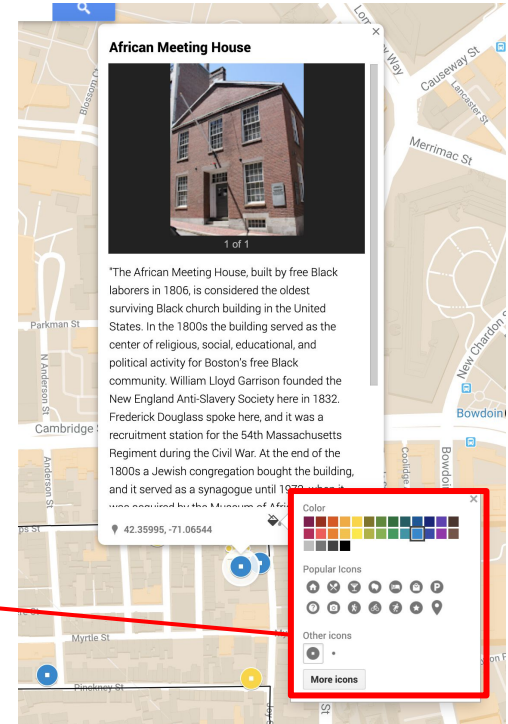
Add More Data to Markers



Tools, left to right: Style, Edit title and description, Add images/video, Delete marker line or polygon

For all markers, you can add a title, description, images, videos, links, and customizable color.

You can change the color and icon of the marker.

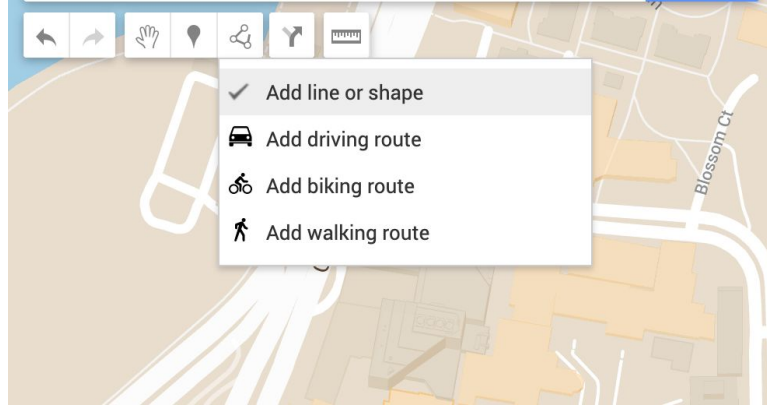


Lines and Polygons

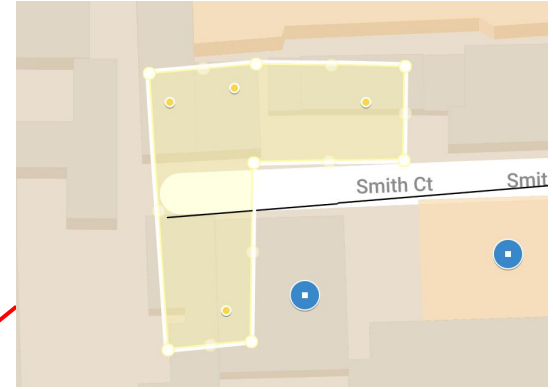
- Google My Maps can also add **lines** and **polygons** to your map. Lines and polygons use fixed points on the map that you select to visualize key information.
 - Lines can demonstrate routes and directions. Lines are easiest to add when you're representing the shape of a route that presently exists.
 - Polygons can demonstrate towns and neighborhoods. Polygons are best for representing the shape of a historic area whose boundaries have since changed.



Add Lines and Polygons



Click “Add line or shape”

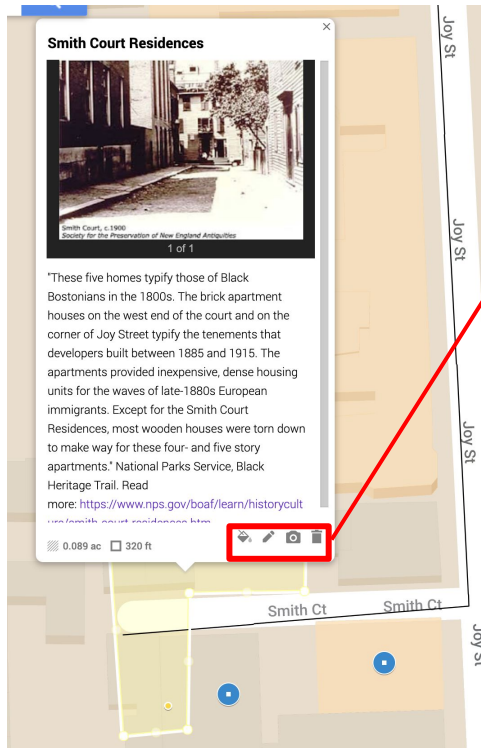


For lines, click where you want to start drawing and then click each corner or bend of the line; double click when you are done with the line.

For polygons, click where you want to start drawing, click each corner or bend of the line, and click back on the first point to finish the shape.



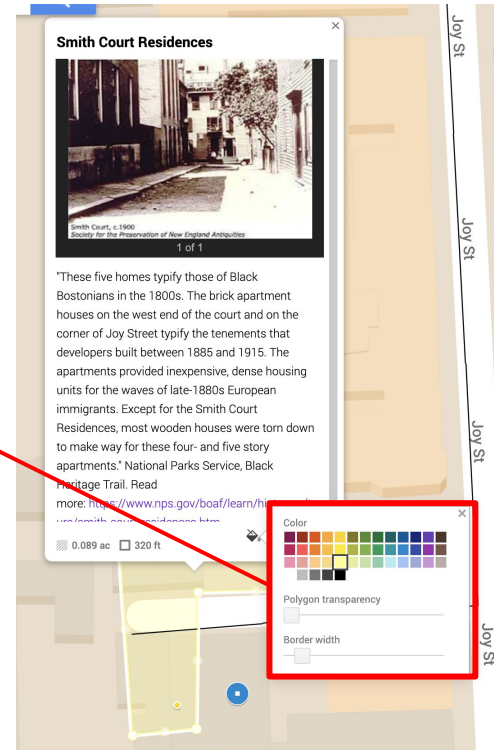
Add More Data to Lines and Polygons



Tools, left to right: Style, Edit title and description, Add images/video, Delete line or polygon

For lines and polygons the color, transparency, and width can be customized.

For all lines and polygons, you can add a title, description, images, videos, and links.



Layers

Layers allow you to sort/filter your geospatial information into different groups. All of your markers, lines, and polygons will be placed into an “Untitled Layer,” so always make sure to title the layer even if you will only have one.

- Individual layers can be turned on and off.
- Layers can be exported individually as KML (a markup language for expressing geographic annotation) to view in Google Earth
- To add a new layer, click “Add Layer”
- Title the layer
- Add markers, lines, or polygons!



Challenges in historical mapping

- Working with historical maps and data can be particularly challenging.
 - Historical information is often partial or complicated, but maps tend to show specific, concrete information.
 - Historical landscapes can shift over time (for example, a substantial portion of the Charles was filled in during the 19th century to create what is now Back Bay).

Think about what is **particularly difficult to represent** or how there might be complexities you should standardize to map your data. Pay close attention to these moments and think about how they impact your understanding of maps as a method for conveying information.



Building your project

For this project, you can choose to map a number of different options related to African American history and literature, two of them suggested below. Or, you might have other ideas!

- You might start from the Cromwell map and select some of the points there to represent in Google Maps, thinking about how the information changes when placed on a contemporary navigational map of the city.
 - You could also add more information to the data from Cromwell, such as looking up the estate valuations of some of the “Black” houses.
- You could map historical copies of the Walker and Stewart texts and compare those with the locations of ports and stops on the railroad, or map information about the review and circulation of these texts.



Get started!

- If you already know what you want to do for your mapping project, go ahead and get started on that in class.
- If you're still figuring things out, just try to add a few points, lines, and polygons—as well as some descriptions and images. The Cromwell map would be a good place to start, if you don't already have something you want to map.
- This is just to give you a bit of practice and a chance to try out Google My Maps.



Discussion

- How do you think differently about these locations when they are in a Google My Maps format?
- What was difficult or easy about this platform?
- What was interesting about seeing your data presented in a Google My Maps format? Are you able to identify any patterns or new ways of thinking about your data?



Thank you!

If you have any questions, contact us at: nulab.info@gmail.com

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Slides, handouts, and data available at <https://bit.ly/diti-fall2020-aljoe>

Schedule an appointment with us! <https://calendly.com/diti-nu>



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