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Intro to Digital Humanities

Final Portfolio Statement

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When I first stepped into this class at the beginning of the semester, I had no idea what the digital humanities field consisted of. Making inferences through its name, I predicted that it had something to do with the humanities field and the internet, but I had no idea how the field connected the two distinct worlds. However, nearing my completion of this introduction course to a growing field, I know understand the role that the internet plays in this field. There are some positives and there are some negatives, but nonetheless the interne plays in vital role in shaping the digital humanities field as well as contributing to the evolution of the field as time goes on. A major theme that I found to reappear throughout this course is how technology innovations have changed the landscape for the digital humanities field. First, in the reading, *Material/digital,* authors Zachary Lesser and Whitney Trettien highlight the relationship between physical objects and the digital copy of that object. The reproduction of physical objects, texts, and data is a big part of what the digital humanities field entails, and advanced technology transformed this process to a level that archivist could never have predicted 20 years ago. In this specific article, my main takeaway was how the power of technology and the digital world allowed for the humans to understand the archival document better through the use of screen rotation and changing the color of backgrounds. This is powerful because legibility can be a major problem when trying to perform archival research, but now we can use digital tools and spaces to help solve issues that have not been solvable in the past. With the power to understand a broader number of documents out there in the world, there are now more credible archives that can be used in various research studies. This article resonated with me ever since we spent a class in the Kislak Center for rare books, Manuscripts, Special Collections, and Schoenberg Center for Electric Text and Image. Being able to witness the precision of the advanced technology that goes into getting these physical texts digitized truly amazed me, even considering the funding that the University has put into all of the technology that the center utilized to achieve its goals. I feel like a big goal throughout this class was to understand the importance of preserving and analyzing older documents that would otherwise be viewed as useless, however, aspects of the digital humanities field allow for these documents’ lifespan to be eternal. Even though I was honestly weary of the Kislak Center due to its very discrete location on the first floor of Vanpelt Library, one aspect I found very fascinating was the emphasis on the lighting and the attention to detail that the researchers had to apply in order for the specialized technology to work its magic. Witnessing the process of texts and documents being published to the web soon had a deeper meaning once I went upstairs and actually had the opportunity to put my hands on older documents. Even though it is becoming a lost art in today’s world due to the rapid emergence of technology and the internet, I also enjoyed scrolling through the pages of archival documents such as old prison records or even W.E.B. DuBois 7th Ward Map. Firstly, I was able to truly live the experiences that Professors Trettien and Lesser drew upon in their work, experiencing the troubles that come with attempting to read texts that were manufactured centuries ago. Secondly, I enjoyed having the ability to care for the material through physical touch, which I feel like brought about more life and purpose to the documents. Even though I still believe that it is powerful that certain rare archival texts are widely accessible to the world now due to the work of people in the field of digital humanities, I believe that having the opportunity to handle physical texts and archives allows for a researcher to have a deeper connection with the material. This relates to a class conversation and a musical cassette workshop that I attended. I had the opportunity to curate my own musical cassette, and the material aspect of the workshop gave me a new appreciation for the material, which reminded me of a conversation we had in class regarding digital surrogates and how digital playlists lose a lot of the customization aspect that comes with music. Lastly, an interest that I discovered of mine through the exploration of the digital humanities field is the preservation of memories and collections, specifically directed towards the black experience in America. Our history, experience, and memories have attempted to be erased so many times throughout history and Dorothy Berry ignited this passion of mine to preserve our history in the *House of Archives* reading that was assigned in the beginning weeks of class. I applied these concepts through my research of the role barbershops played in Eastern State Penitentiary because I knew that the memories and experiences of barbershops dating back to the 19th century all plays in a role how prevalent barbershops are in our communities today. The ability to ensure that experiences live on forever is very powerful, and that is something that draws me to further explore and contribute to the art of digital humanities in the future.