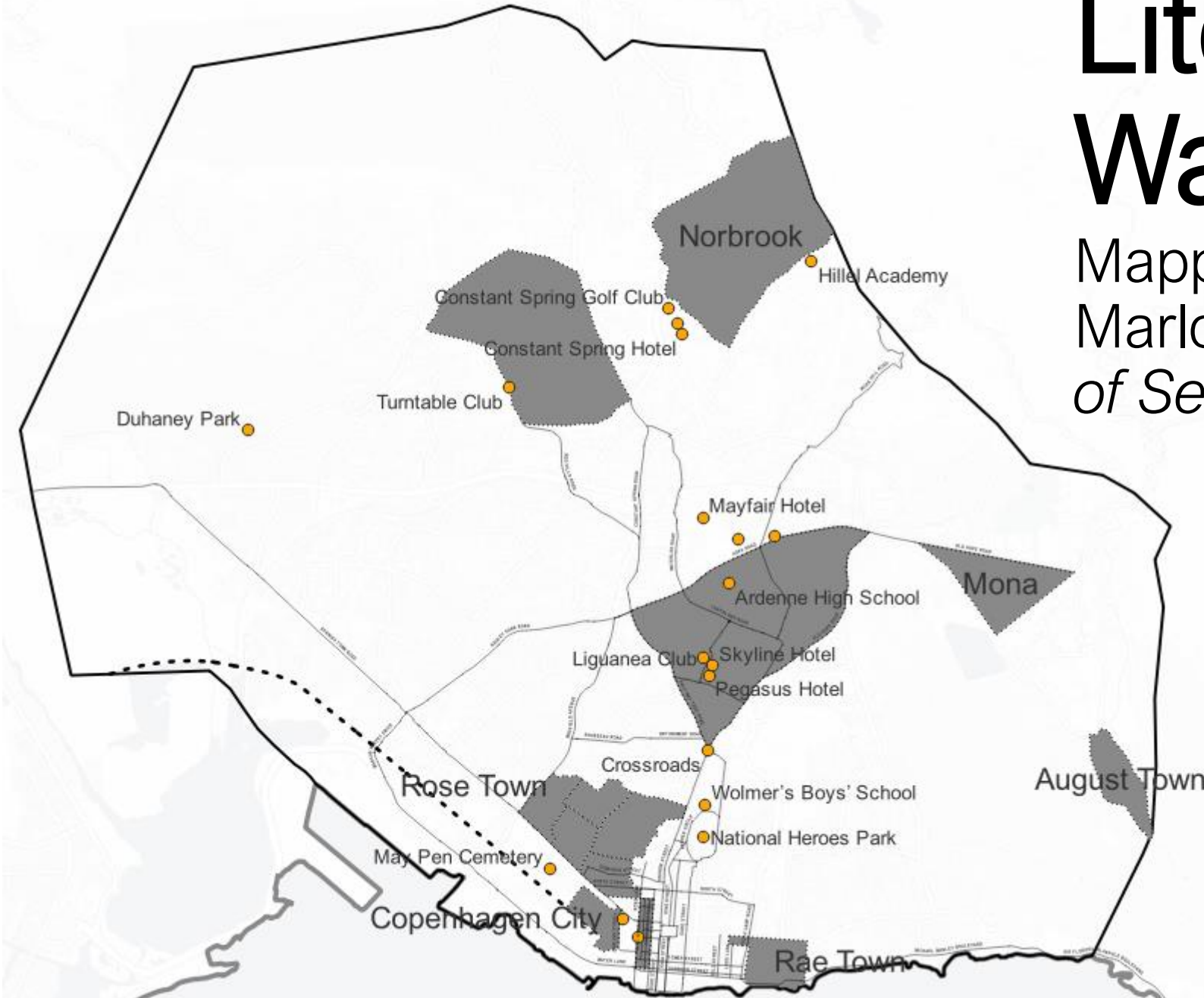


# Literary Wayfinding

Mapping Contested Space in  
Marlon James's *A Brief History  
of Seven Killings*



Jacob Moose  
Thesis defense  
for the degree of Master Science  
in Digital Humanities

Academic year 2023-2024

**KU LEUVEN**

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## Conclusion

# Introduction

- “Truth” and The Historical Novel
- *A Brief History* and Representations of Contested Space
- An Interdisciplinary Framework

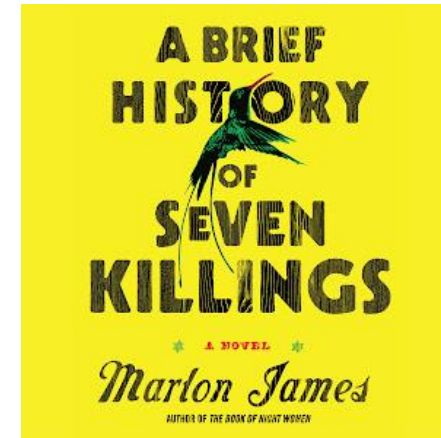
# “Fact” and “Fiction” in the Historical Novel

## “Real” World



VS..

## World of The Novel



- Recognize the ontological differences between the two “worlds” (McHale)
- Acknowledge “freedom” of the “world of the novel” while simultaneously analyze its overlap with the “real world” (McHale)
- Use insights from each “world” to discover deeper insights (infrastructural humanities)

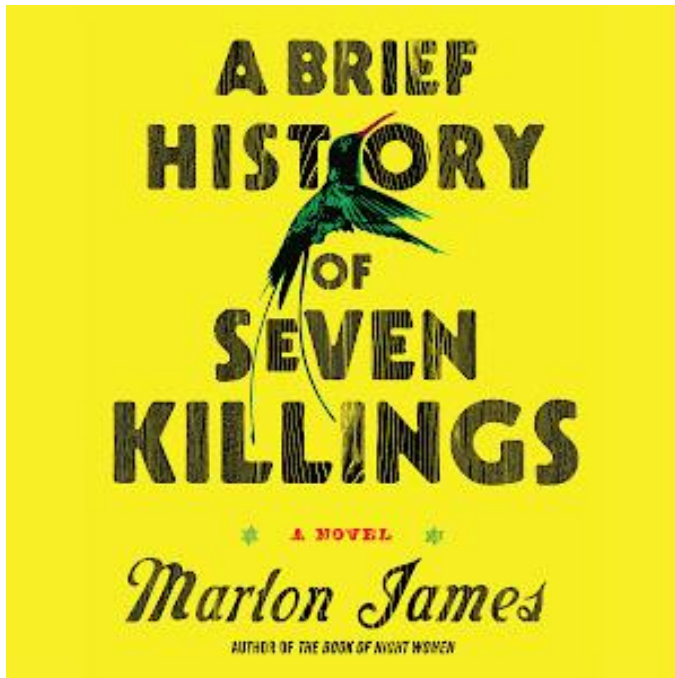
# *A Brief History* and Representations of Contested Space

## Goal:

- Analyze the novel's representations of Kingston's urban geography
- Locate divergences and overlaps between the two "worlds"
- Focus on slum clearance and urban housing schemes from 1960s.

## Questions:

- Why were Kingston's slum clearance and urban housing schemes so contentious?
- How does the novel use fiction to demonstrate and expand upon this contention?
- And what benefits are gained from mapping representations of contested space through historical geographic information, GIS tools, and close readings of the novel?



# An Interdisciplinary Framework



Historical  
Lens

## **PROS**

- Helps contextualize history that is implicitly connected to the novel
- Provides a strong foundation for reading “fact” and “fiction” in the novel

## **CONS**

- Can distract from the “truth” that emerges in the explicitly fictional elements of the novel
- Based more in textual analysis, and cannot visualize insights easily

Literary  
Lens

## **PROS**

- Helps reveal new insights from the “world of the novel” that are not accessible in the historical approach
- Ability to find “truth” in the fictionalization of history

## **CONS**

- Without historical approach, can be hard to analysis the “world of the novel” and find hidden some of its hidden insights
- Based more in textual analysis, and cannot visualize insights as easily

Visual  
Lens

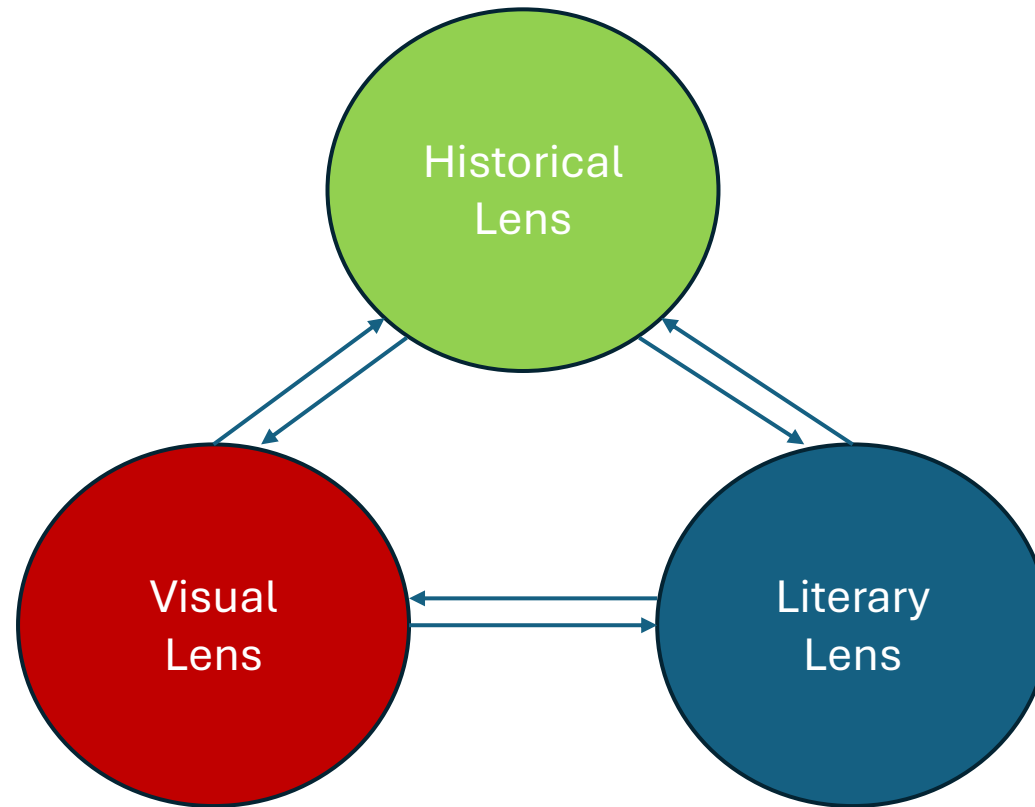
## **PROS**

- Helps *show* the physical shape representations of contested space take in the novel
- Reinforces the important role contested space plays in the novel

## **CONS**

- Must be accompanied by deeper textual analysis (i.e., historical and literary approaches) so that the information being visualized is adequately contextualized

# An Interdisciplinary Framework



# Historical Lens

- Rural-to-Urban Migration (1820-1938)
- The Nationalist Movement (1938-1962)
- Political Polarization (1942-1976)
- The Cases of Back-O-Wall and Tivoli Gardens



# Increased Rural-to-Urban Migration

Kingston: British  
prosperity under  
mercantilism  
1800

Abolishment  
of Slavery  
Act  
1834

Sugar  
Duties  
Act  
1846

First Major  
Shift in  
Demographics  
1860

Growth of  
Colonial  
Ghettos  
1920s

Increased Rural-to-Urban  
Migration during the Great  
Depression  
1930s

- Shift away from mercantilism towards liberal Free Trade
- Birth of Rural Peasantry



- Growth of Agricultural TNCs
- Less (fair-waged) opportunities for rural black population



- Growth of Shantytowns in West Kingston
- Slums marked by poor conditions and inadequate aid

*Back-O-Wall  
(Jamaican Gleaner)*

# The Nationalist Movement

**Growth of the  
Brown Middle  
Class  
1860**

**Increased  
Frustrations during  
the Great Depression  
1930s**

**The  
Labor  
Revolts  
1938**

**An  
Increasingly  
Stratified City  
1950s**

**Birth of  
New  
Kingston  
1960s**

**Independence  
1962**

- Characterized by anti-colonial sentiment, but also anti-black at times
- Often had more opportunities than freed black population

- Middle Class solidarity with lower classes
- Birth of Trade Unions
- Movement for Independence

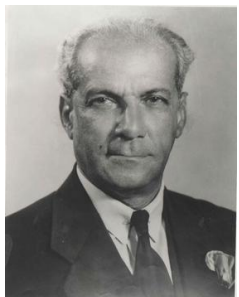
- Movement away from city core towards new suburbs
- Development of “Uptown” and “Downtown”



*Mona Heights, 1958  
(Jamaican Gleaner)*

# Political Polarization

Birth of People's  
National Party  
(PNP)  
1938



Norman Manley



Birth of Jamaican  
Labour Party  
(JLP)  
1942



Alexander Bustamante



(JLP Victories)  
Elections  
of  
1944 and 1948

(PNP Victory)  
Election  
of  
1955

Destruction Of Back-O-Wall  
And  
Birth of Tivoli Gardens  
1960s

- Political climate defined by violence
- Growth in client-patron politics

- Political climate defined by slander and personal attacks

- First major slum clearance and (partisan) redevelopment schemes

# The Cases of Back-O-Wall and Tivoli Gardens

## Back-O-Wall



*Back-O-Wall  
(Jamaican Gleaner)*

- Shantytown in West Kingston near location of historical colonial ghettos
- Characterized by its extremely poor health conditions, but spirit of political co-existence
- Key place for rural migrants and other minorities (i.e., Rastafarians)
- Destruction beginning in 1963, with displaced people being promised new housing

## Tivoli Gardens



*Development of  
Tivoli Gardens  
(Jamaican Gleaner)*

- Modern Housing unit constructed on ruins on Back-O-Wall and surrounding shanties
- Initiated by Edward Seaga, A JLP statesman and future Prime Minister
- First major politicized housing development in which housing units were given almost exclusively to JLP constituents
- Redefines Kingston's urban infrastructure

# Literary Lens

- Finding History within *A Brief History*
- Reading Fiction within *A Brief History*

# Finding History within *A Brief History*

- Searching for similarities/overlaps between key fictionalized spaces in the novel and “real world”
- Using these similarities to connect novel with insights found in the historical approach

## Balacava

- Squatter Camp / Slum characterized by its poor conditions (452)
- Impoverished while Uptown is expanded upon (14)
- Defined by lack of political violence (89)
- Bulldozered to the ground so Copenhagen City “could rise” (89)

## Copenhagen City

- Built on remains of Balacava
- Introduces (limited) modern amenities to some of the urban poor (152)
- Built for JLP constituents, like Papa-Lo who becomes new community Don/Enforcer (90)
- Accompanied by new wave of violence characterized by advanced weaponry (15).

# Reading Fiction within *A Brief History*

## The 1966 Generation

- Know of Balaclava and political co-existence before “political come”
- Know artificiality of current situation (i.e., garrison communities and clientel politics)
- Exploit younger generation to help them gain power

## Bam-Bam and 1976 Kingston

- Has only experienced a model that is defined by Copenhagen City
- Polarized politics – believes JLP helps JLP and PNP helps PNP
- Personal Subjectivity is largely shaped by JLP politics

## Uptown Generation

- Understand that there are differences between Uptown and Downtown, but haven’t experienced them or made in effort to change them
- Rarely go beneath Crossroads and therefore have limited understanding of the situation
- Exploit violence in Downtown for their own political security

*“That is the problem with these young rudies, they wasn’t around for the fall of Balaclava in 1966 [. . .] Everybody talking like they only know ghetto”(42).*

*“The world is not a ghetto and a ghetto is not the world. People in the ghetto suffer because there be people who live for making them suffer. Good time is bad time for somebody too” (416).*

—Josey Walles

*“but Copenhagen City and the Eight Lanes both too big and every time you reach the edge, the edge move ahead of you like a shadow until the whole world is a ghetto, and you wait” (8).*

—Bam-Bam

*“To think I try so hard not to be lumped with those fuckers on the North Coast wearing Jamaican Me Crazy t-shirts, but how many times can you say, Brother, I’ve been to the real Jamaica” (372).*

—Alex Pierce

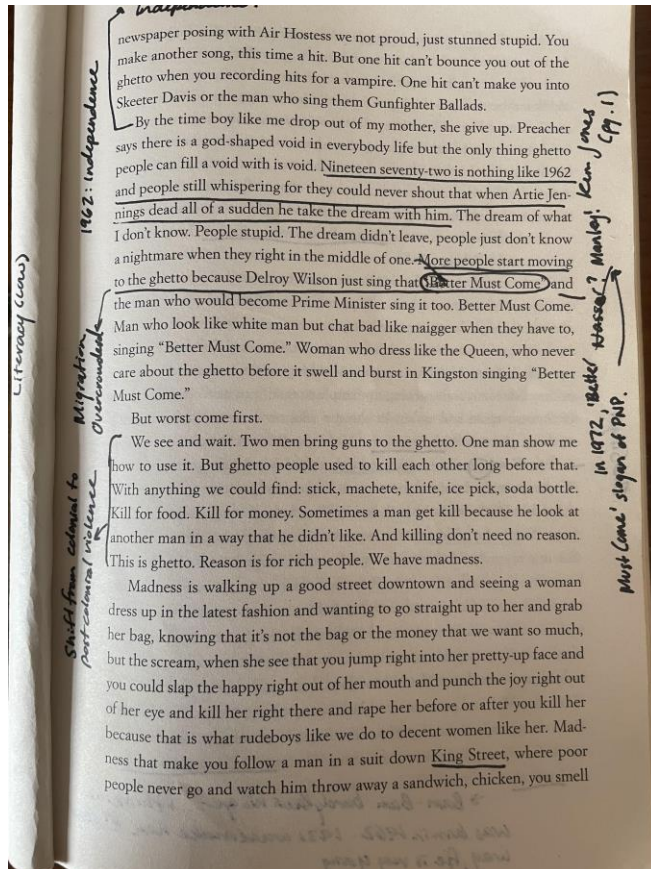


# Visual Lens

- Collecting and Organizing Data
- Data Processing
- Analyses 1 – 3
- Interactive Map
- Reflections/Discussion

# Collecting and Organizing Data

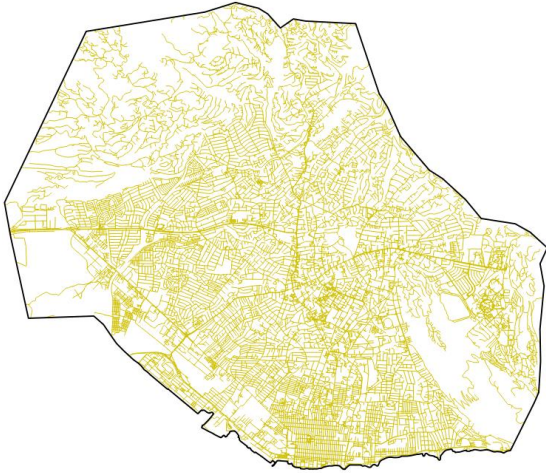
## Close Reading



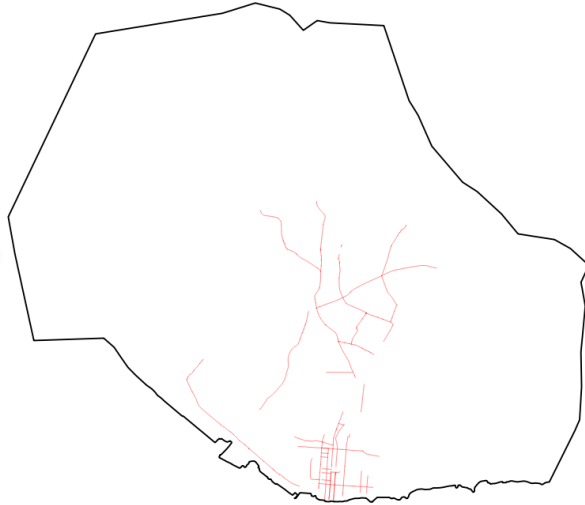
## Inputting in Excel

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	<b>Street Name</b>						
2	King Street						
3	Princess Street						
4	Harbour street						
5	Pechon Street						
6	North Street						
7	Orange Street						
8	Darling Street						
9	Duke Street						
10	Tower Street						
11	Gold Street						
12	Ladd Lane						
13	Rose Lane						
14	Orange Lane						
15	Marcus Garvey Drive						
16	Knutsford Boulevard						
17	Maxfield Avenue						
18	South Parade						
19	Hope Road						
20	Waterloo Road						
21	Half Way Tree Road						
22	Constant Spring Road						
23	Lady Musgrave Road						
24	Red Hills Road						
25	Retirement Road						
26	Oxford Road						
27	Trafalgar Road						
28	Marescaux Road						
29	East King's House Road						
30	Dumfries Road						
31							

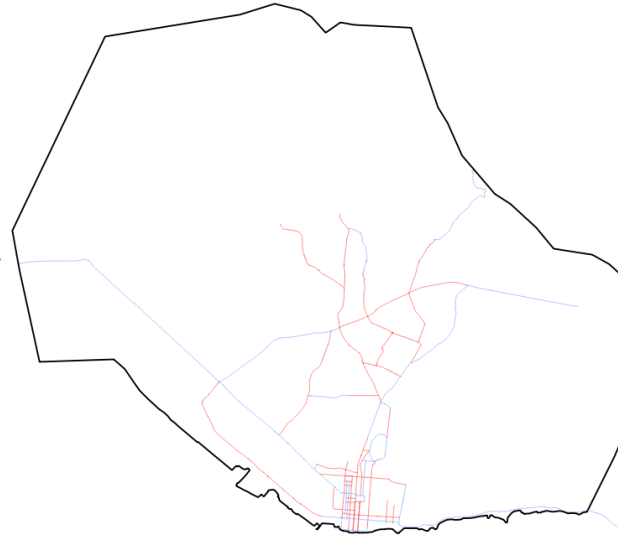
# Data Processing: Streets



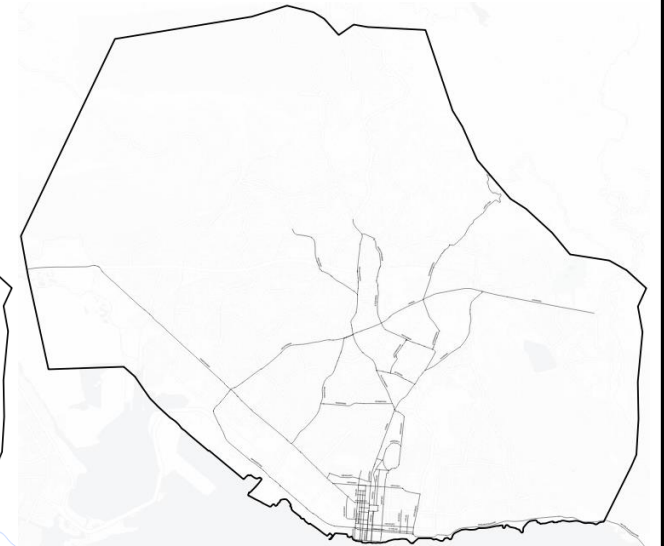
- Step 1: Kingston Metropolitan Boundary (KMA), clipped streets for context



- Step 2: *A Brief History*: Streets Listed

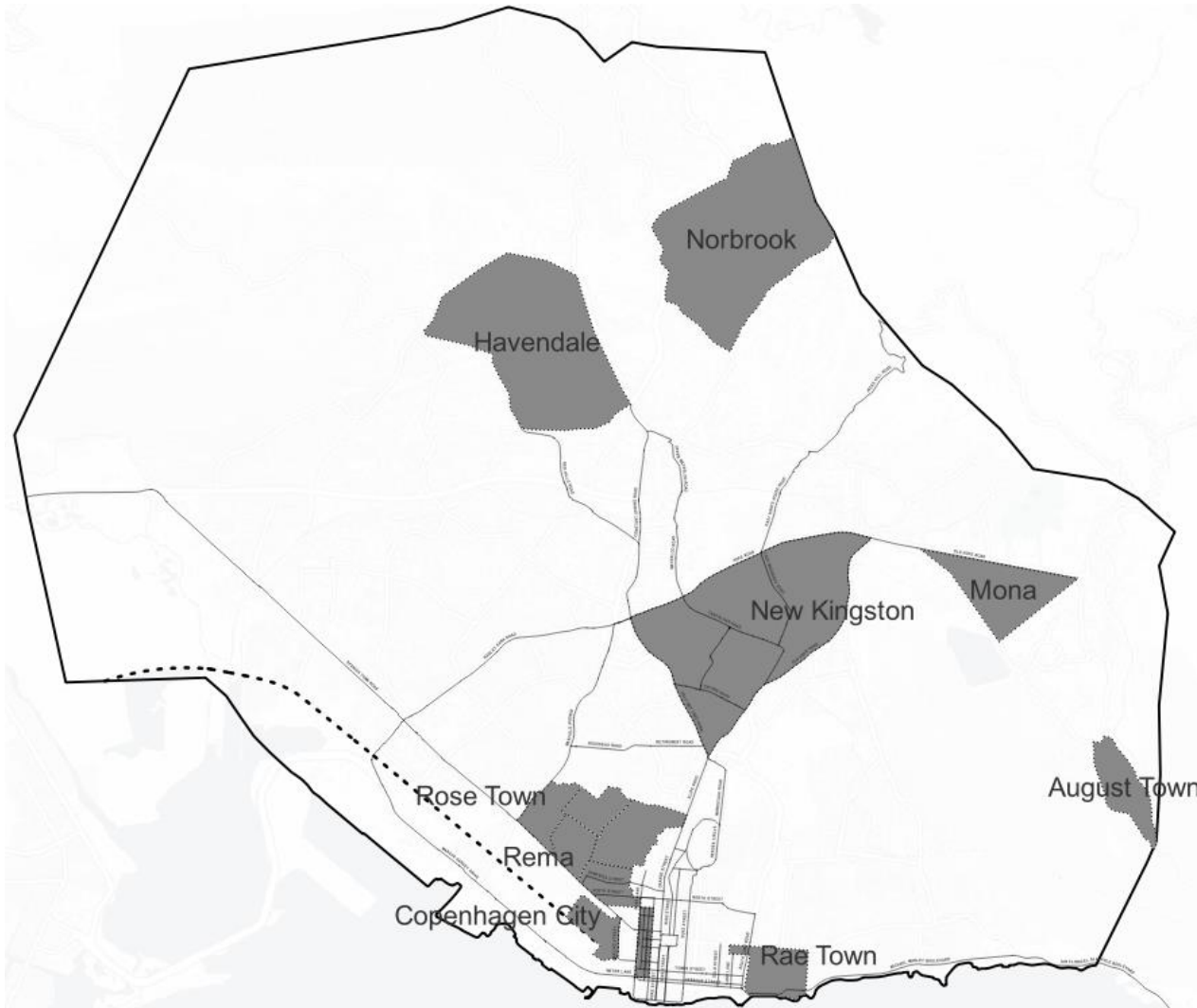


- Step 3: *A Brief History*: Streets Assumed & Listed



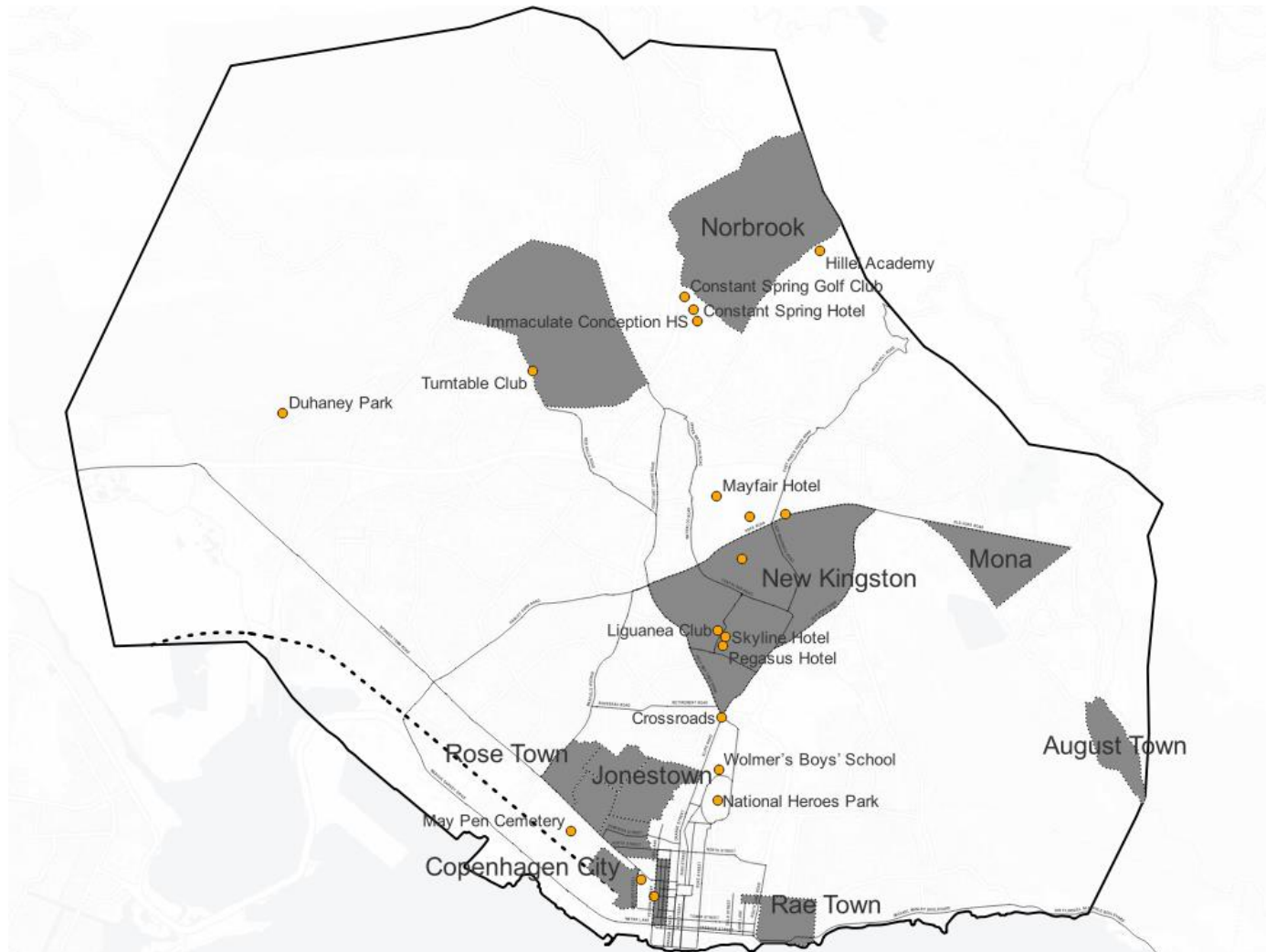
- Step 4: *A Brief History*: Streets (Merged and Labeled). Positron added for depth

# Data Processing: Uptown/Downtown



- Step 1: Find Boundary Data (STATIN reference)
- Step 2: Provide additional attributes:  
Name  
Uptown/Downtown  
Political Affiliation
- Step 3: Merge into single layer

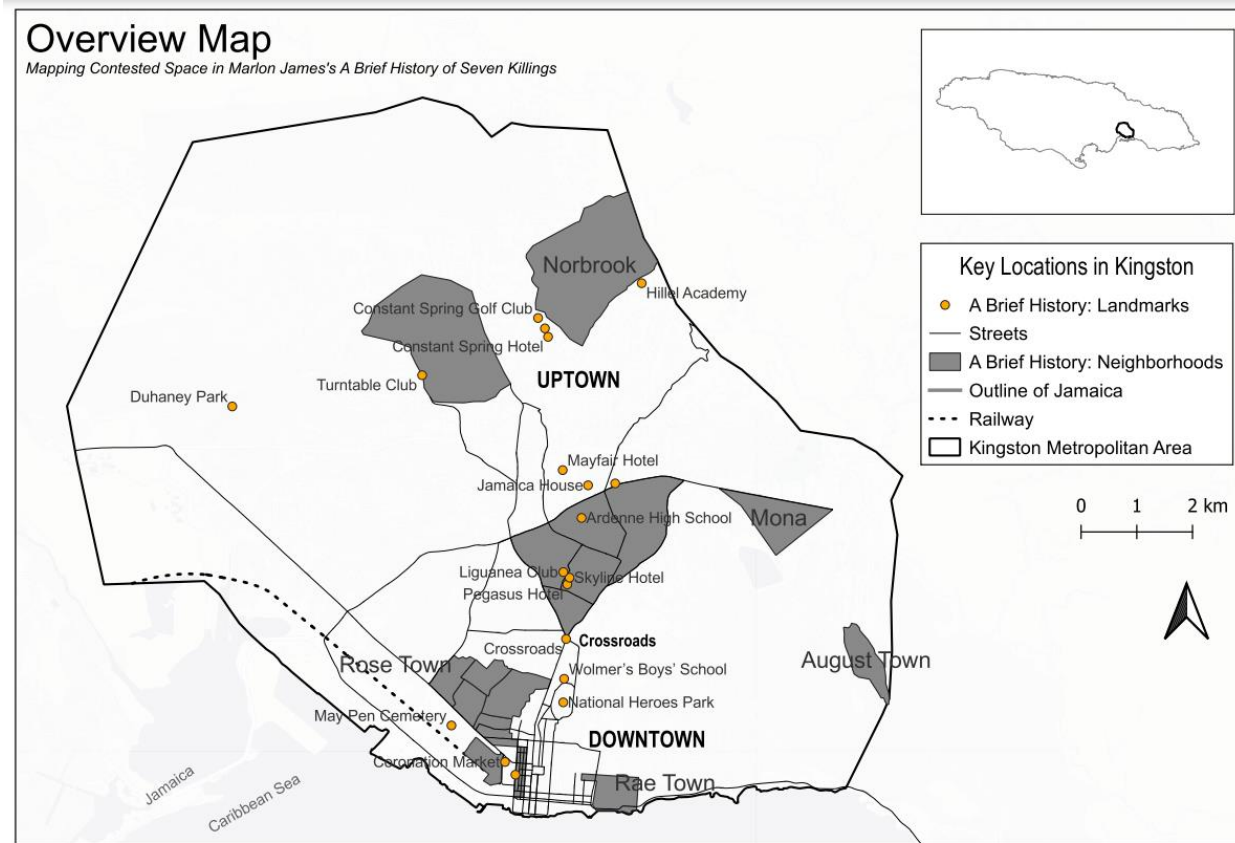
# Data Processing: Landmarks



- Step 1: Locate Landmark data  
Schools  
Clubs  
Parks  
etc.
- Step 2: Merge into unified layer



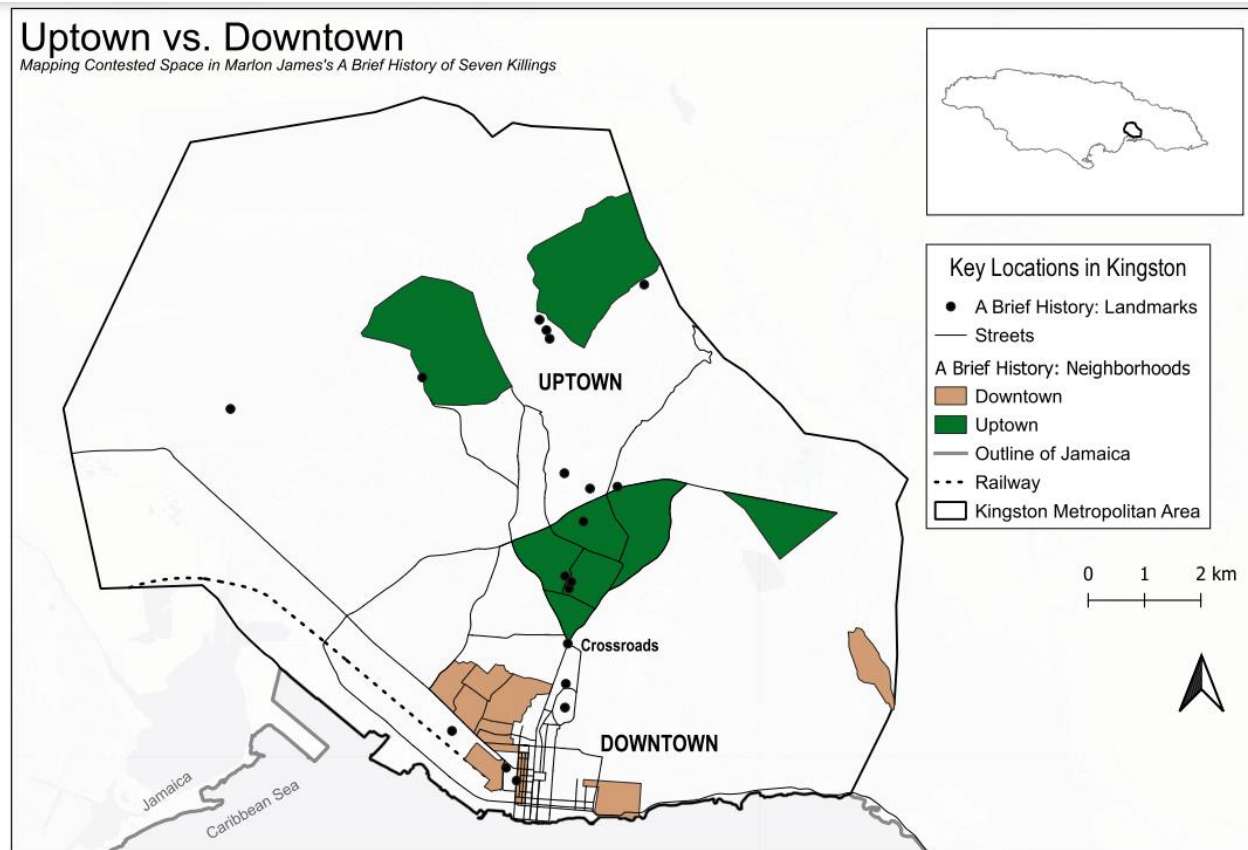
# Analysis #1: Literary Wayfinding



## Benefits of Map:

- Guide for reading the novel (i.e., helping readers locate where events/spaces exist in relation to each other)
- Example 1: Bam-Bam running from The Eight Lanes to Copenhagen City
- Example 2: Alex Pierce's time at New Kingston hotels; distance from Downtown

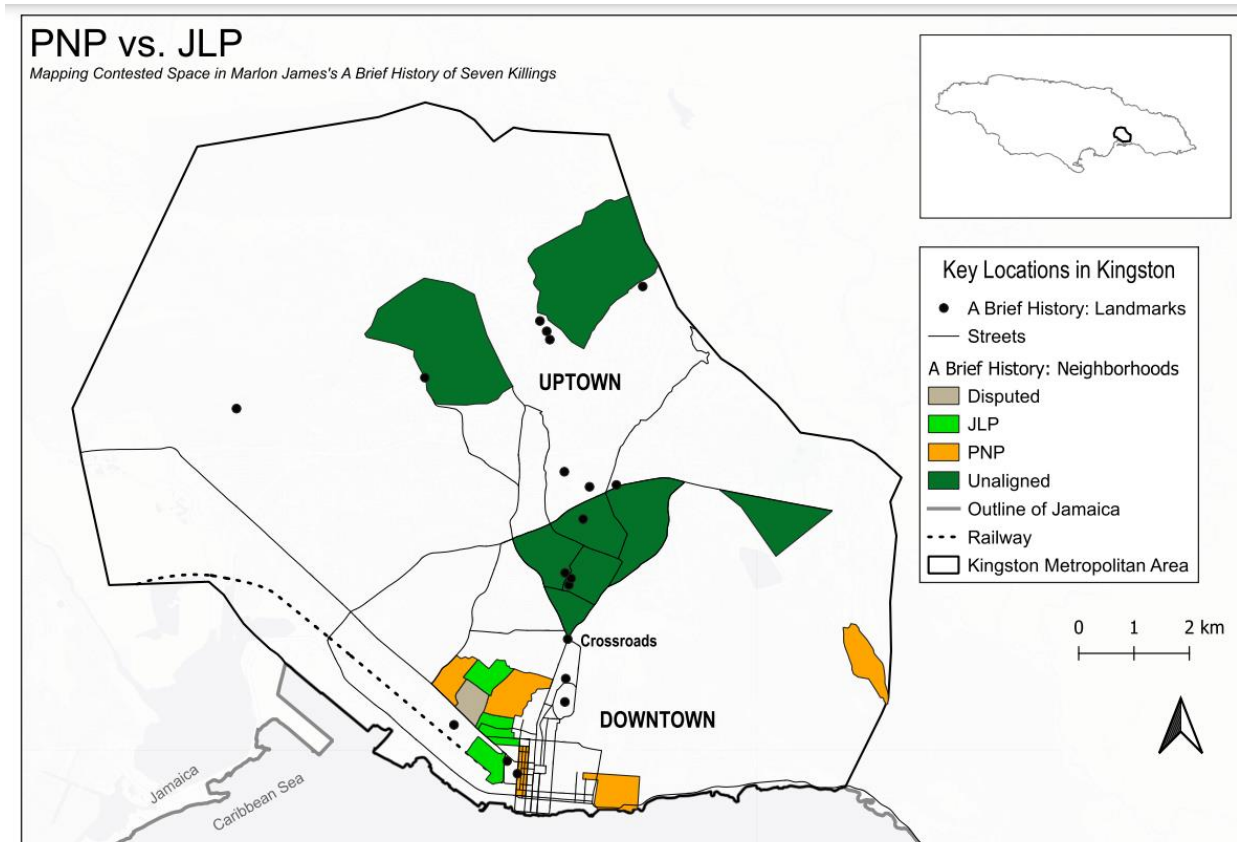
# Analysis #2: Uptown vs. Downtown



## Benefits of Map:

- Shows the clear divide between Uptown and Downtown
- Crossroads as middle point, separating upper/middle and lower classes
- Example 1: Can see why “the whole world is a ghetto” for people like Bam-Bam
- Example 2: Reinforces central role contested space plays in the novel

# Analysis #3: PNP vs. JLP

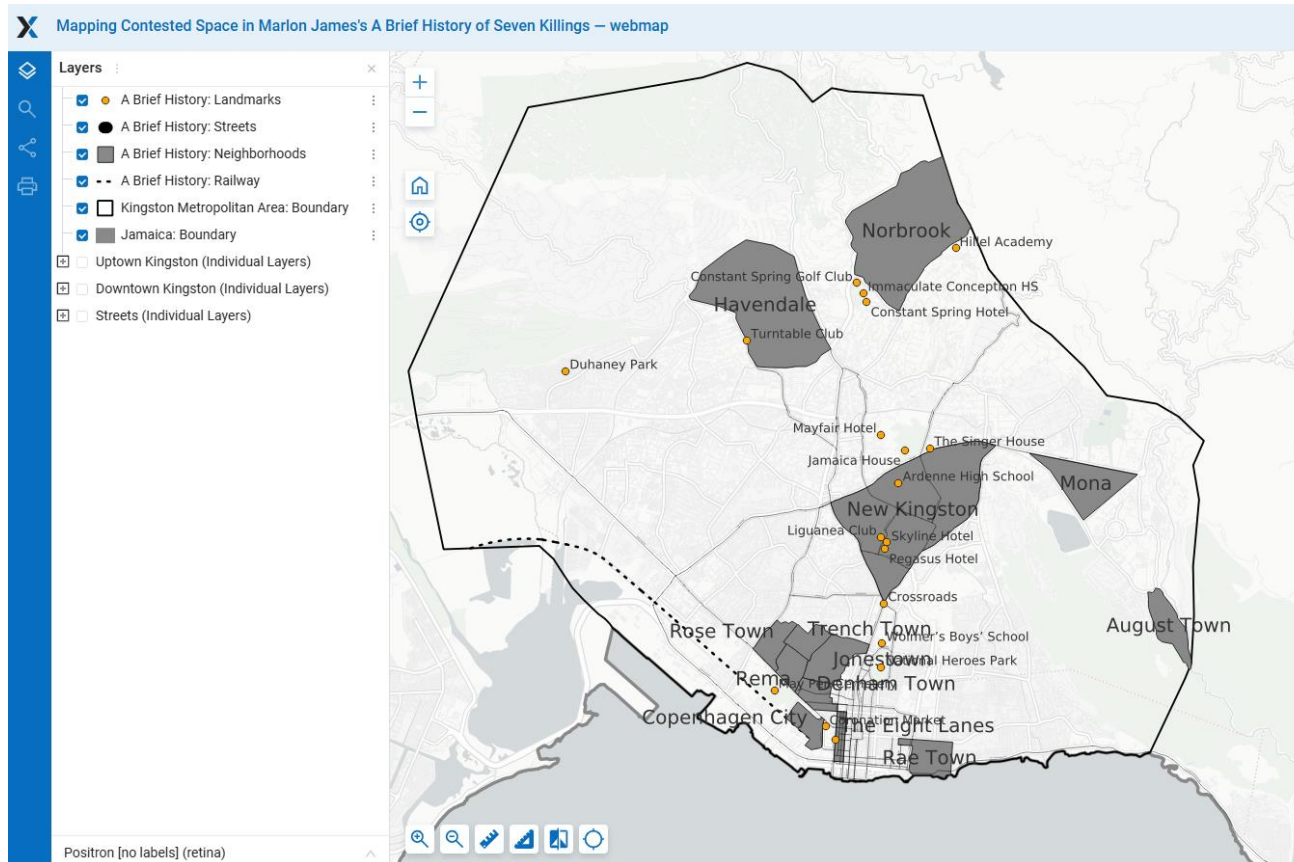


## Benefits of Map

- Highlights political freedom of Uptown residents and political tension embedded in Downtown
- Rema as key space
  - Disputed: Linked to both JLP and PNP in different elections
  - Located in precarious position between other JLP and PNP territories



# Interactive Map







## Benefits of Map

- Readers able to analyze each location more closely, including individual layers
- Engagement with Map online can allow for new insights from other perspectives / allow others to fix possible errors (i.e., missing spaces)

# Reflections

- Strength: Offers new framework for readers who are interested in representations of contested space in the novel or more generally lost in it.
- Strength: Helps readers more easily locate spaces that might be difficult to find on a more traditional map
- Strength: Includes fictionalized spaces not included in traditional maps (i.e., Copenhagen City, The Eight Lanes)
- Limitations: OCR? Collaboration with Jamaican Institutes? (STATIN)
- Future Analysis: Mapping characters' direct movements? Working more with users through the interactive maps?



# Future Possibilities: Designing with Readers


 **r/books** • 5 mo. ago  
 jrmoose\_3 


## Marlon James A Brief History of Seven Killings... Thoughts on Space?


Hi Everyone,

Just finished Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings*! With so many different narrators, I am wondering how other readers perceived representations of infrastructure and space throughout the book, especially as it relates to descriptions of Kingston. When reading, did you have clear ideas of the where everyone was moving around, living in, or possibly even avoiding? What strategy's did you employ to keep track of the setting? Let me know your thoughts!

 **20** 





 **33**



 **Share**

### Post Insights

Only the post author and moderators can see this

<b>66K</b>  Total Views	<b>83%</b>  Upvote Rate	<b>33</b>  Comments	<b>29</b>  Total Shares
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**Hourly views for first 48 hours** ⓘ  
Some insights are no longer available because this post is older than 45 days

- “I enjoyed this book but don't remember thinking too deeply about where each location is in relation to the others, moreso the relationships between characters and how they changed over time” (jimbsmithjr)
- “As long as I knew where the characters were in the moment, it didn't really matter where one setting was relative to another.” (NicPizzaLatte)
- “Just finished it too. Kingston felt real with all the details. I got mixed up with the places though, so I sketched a little map to keep track.” (Orwells\_Snowball)

05

# Conclusion

# Expertise gained

- In utilizing historical, literary, and visual approaches, this thesis has created a more comprehensive framework for analyzing literary and contested space.
- This includes a more innovate visual lens, that used GIS as a means for actually identifying the shape contested space takes in the novel, while simultaneously adhering to well-established literary techniques, like close reading.
- (Personal) Introduces a new framework that I can utilize in future analyses within the infrastructural humanities, literary studies, urban studies, and more.
  - I.e., future Ph.D. opportunities dealing with cultural representations of space, urban structures, materials, etc.

The background of the slide features a light grey map of Mexico. A large, semi-transparent grey circle is positioned on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the map. The text "Thank you" is centered on the left side of the slide.

**Thank you**