

Slide 1: Thank you for reading my work and preparing your thoughts for this defense. “Literary Wayfinding: Mapping Contested Space in Marlon James’s *A Brief History of Seven Killings*,” is a project that was born out my own interests in the geo- and infrastructural humanities, as well as a broader interest in the literary work of Marlon James. I look forward to discussing this further with you and hearing your questions.

Slide 2: Today’s presentation will begin with an introduction to James’s historical novel and my three-pronged approach to analyzing representations of contested space in it. This will then be followed by a deeper discussion on the individual lenses I utilized, including a historical lens, a literary lens, and a visual lens. Each of these three lenses offer unique benefits to the study of contested space, and one of my goals in this presentation is to demonstrate how bringing them together helps introduce a more comprehensive framework for interpreting James’s novel. The presentation will then conclude with some reflections surrounding the thesis as a whole, and how I can possibly apply the framework I developed for future academic pursuits.

Slide 3: To begin with my introduction,

Slide 4: *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a historical novel that deals with “real” events from Jamaica’s past. It is structured in a polyphonic fashion with over 30 narrators and 70 characters, many of whom seemingly relate to historical figures. Considering that the novel blurs fact and fiction, critics have approached these characters, as well as other historical events and spaces discussed throughout the novel, from different angles, some instinctively privileging their alleged historicity over their fictionality, and vice versa. Following the work of Brian McHale and other critics including James himself, this thesis operated under the assumption that both of these angles are valid but explicitly related to two separate worlds: the “real” extratextual world of the reader and the world of the novel. Acknowledging the distinction of these two worlds is important, as it permits the novel to deviate from historical fact while simultaneously overlap with it. Rather than focusing solely on one of these worlds, this thesis utilized both in order to discover deeper insights surrounding Kingston’s contested space, a practice similar seen in the infrastructural humanities.

Slide 5: In recognizing the role both “the real world” and the “world of the novel” play in understanding James’s novel, a more definitive goal of this thesis was to look closer at representations of Kingston’s contested space throughout the narrative, exploring the overlaps and divergences these representations shared between each world. Considering contested space can take a variety of different meanings in an urban-Jamaican context, my focus primarily surrounded the novel’s portrayal of slum clearance and urban housing schemes that began in Kingston during the 1960s. In focusing on this, I asked the following three 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?

Slide 6: Answering these questions cannot be easily done through any singular approach, and this thesis utilized an interdisciplinary framework defined by three separate lenses: A Historical Lens, a Literary Lens, and a Visual Lens. Each of these lenses offer different benefits and drawbacks for understanding representations of contested space in James's novel. For the Historical Lens, one benefit was its ability to contextualize the narrative within a broader history. However, its focus on "reality" could simultaneously distract from the insights gleaned from the world of the novel and was therefore accompanied by a literary lens dedicated to close readings of the world of the novel itself. Considering neither of these lens offered the ability to actually see the shape contested space takes in the novel, these were then accompanied by a final visual lens that was set on mapping representations of contested space themselves.

Slide 7: James's novel remained at the heart of each lens, though in different ways. By utilizing all of them together, playing the weaknesses of one off the other, this thesis developed a more comprehensive framework for understanding representations of contested space and the central role they throughout the novel.

Slide 8: Turning now to the individual lens, the historical lens highlighted three key movements in Kingston's "real" urban development: mainly, Rural-to-Urban migration beginning in the late-19th century, The National Movement during the early 20th century, and the growth of political politicalization during the mid-20th century. Analysis of each of these movements was used to help demonstrate *why* Kingston's urban slum clearance and urban rehousing schemes at places like Back-O-Wall and Tivoli Gardens were so contentious.

Slide 9: By focusing on rural-to-urban migration, I demonstrated how increased population pressures in Kingston during the 20th century largely developed out of a series of political and economic decisions that were deeply connected to the country's earlier experiences with colonialism and slavery. This included an in-depth discussion on the Sugar Duties Act of 1846 and the effect it had on the black plantation workers, rural peasantry, and the growth of shantytowns in West Kingston.

Slide 10: From this movement, I then demonstrated how the growth of shantytowns in West Kingston was taken advantage of by the brown middle class who leveraged the size and mobilization of the lower class to assist in overcoming the country's colonial governance (all while frequently holding anti-black sentiments). This facilitated in the social stratification of the city, where upper and middle class residents began to physically move Uptown to areas like New Kingston and Mona Heights away from the Downtown poor.

Slide 11: The last movement then focused on how the increasingly stratified city led to the growth of political polarization between the newly formed PNP and JLP parties. As each party sought power, they began engaging with more clientelistic models of governance in which constituents were gifted basic needs such as housing in exchange for party support. This would directly result in the establishment of party and turf politics, as well as the growth of overtly politicized communities.

Slide 12: From these movements, I could more closely look at Back-O-Wall and Tivoli Gardens, the first major slum clearance and partisan urban redevelopment schemes that occurred in the 1960s. I focused on how the destruction of Back-O-Wall – a key space for rural migrants and diverse political coexistence – was replaced by partisan politics and the JLP-affiliated Tivoli Gardens. While Tivoli Gardens admittedly offered modern benefits to the area, it simultaneously redefined Kingston's urban infrastructure by turning housing schemes into opportunities for each party to solidify geographic strongholds of support. This would lead to an era of garrisonization in which newly formed political communities would commit violence against one another to help ensure the success of their party.

Slide 13: The Historical lens discussed events that went beyond James's novel, but nonetheless was vital in contextualizing how and why the slum clearance and urban rehousing schemes during the 1960s could take place. From this, I turned to the Literary Lens in which I focused directly on the novel's representations of these spaces themselves.

Slide 14: Before looking for unique insights derived from the novel's fictionality, this lens searched for some key similarities or overlaps between the world of the novel and insights learned through the Historical Lens. In particular, this involved connecting the fictional slum of Balaclava with Kingston's slum clearance schemes and the fictional community of Copenhagen City with the urban redevelopment schemes (mainly Back-O-Wall and Tivoli Gardens). Similarities between these spaces surrounded the poor but lively spirit of Balaclava, its bulldozing so the JLP aligned Copenhagen City could rise, and the violence introduced through this process.

Slide 15: From this, I identified a few key insights derived from the fictional world of the novel itself, especially as it relates to the different ways the slum clearance and urban housing schemes impacted the subjectivities of different social groups. This included a specific focus on how the experiences of the novel's 1966 Generation who know Balaclava allows them to operate in the city differently from younger, "rude boys" like Bam-Bam who only know of the model defined by Copenhagen City, polarized politics, and JLP objectives more generally. These groups were then compared against characters from the Uptown population who might understand that there is an Uptown/Downtown divide, but do nothing to change it, generally avoid going beneath the Crossroads, and even exploit the situation for their own benefit.

Slide 16: For enforcers like Josey Wales, his experiences with Balaclava allow him to have a larger understanding of the world, to see beyond the ghetto. Nevertheless, he uses this vision to exploit characters like Bam-Bam who believe "the whole world is a ghetto" based upon his limited interaction with spaces outside of Copenhagen City. This dynamic differs drastically from the Uptown residents like Alex Pierce who are desperate to be included in "the real Jamaica." Understanding this dimension of the novel allows for interesting new insights into the impact contested space has on subjectivities, politics, and more. But what exactly does this contested space look like in the context of the novel?

Slide 17: In the final lens, the visual lens, this thesis focused on visualizing the novel's representations of contested space themselves. This involved utilizing geographic data from the real world, as well as literary data from the world of the novel to create three key analyses and an interactive map for reader engagement.

Slide 18: Identifying representations of contested space occurred through a close reading of the novel, in which individual streets, communities, landmarks, and more were noted and inputted into an Excel document. This process required meticulous engagement with the text itself and cross-referencing data using keyword searches from an encrypted EPUB version of the novel to minimize omissions.

Slide 19: Once the data was gathered, qGIS was employed and streets were mapped through geographic data from OpenStreetMap. This involved several key steps: First, creating a boundary for the Kingston Metropolitan Area and clipping streets for context. Second, creating a "Streets Listed" layer showing the streets actually mentioned throughout the novel. Third, creating a "streets assumed layer that filled in small gaps or other streets inferred to based on context, and Fourth, merging these streets into a single layer with labels and a Positron background for increased depth. This fourth layer could then serve as the main layer of the project, but if readers were still interested in seeing how this layer was created, the individual layers could also be consulted.

Slide 20: A similar process was used from Uptown and Downtown communities. Considering the novel does not explicitly state how each of the communities' boundaries are defined, this thesis utilized boundary data defined by the statistical institute of Jamaica (STATIN). Each of the communities used were then given additional attributes, including Names, their categorization as being either Uptown or Downtown and their Political Affiliations. These were then merged into a single layer that could be easily utilized alongside the merged street layer.

Slide 21: The last step then was to define key landmarks mentioned in the novel, including schools, clubs, Parks, and more. These were included under a single layer and labeled for easy engagement.

Slide 22: From the qGIS file, I engaged with three individual maps, each offering different insights into the novel. The first was a general "Literary Wayfinding Map" that can be used as a guide to help reader locate where events/space exist in relation to each other. While this more generally can enrich the reading experience, it more importantly can reveal insights, such as the limited distant Bam-Bam runs to get to Copenhagen City from The Eight Lanes or how far Alex Pierce actually is from Downtown violence.

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Slide 28: To conclude,

Slide 29: 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 innovative 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. In terms of my own personal gain, this thesis has helped expand upon methods for literary studies, a major goal of mine in joining this program. Considering my interest in literature as well as urban studies, infrastructure humanities, and more, I hope to apply for Ph.D. programs and apply similar frameworks to other novels or cultural representations more generally.

Slide 30: Thank you.