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Mapping for Accountability: Decolonizing Land Acknowledgment Initiatives

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Abstract

What does it mean to map Indigenous presence onto lands that have been appropriated by settler colonial nation states? This chapter examines the challenges and potentials of re-inscribing Indigenous land relations through a digital mapping project, Indigenous Pennsylvania: Past, Present and Future. Situating itself within the growing scholarship of Indigenous cartographies, the chapter presents Indigenous Pennsylvania as an example of d-ecomedia, a shorthand we offer for ecomedia projects that foreground decolonial methodologies. Such methodologies prompt us to attend to a storied sense of Indigenous place-based relations through attention to Indigenous spatial and temporal modes of mediation.

Keywords

Indigenous, Land Acknowledgments, Mapping, Cartography

Disciplines

Digital Humanities | Environmental Sciences | Geography | Indigenous Studies

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MAPPING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Decolonizing Land Acknowledgment Initiatives

Salma Monani and Sarah Gilsoul

Introduction

In August 2022, a digital ArcGIS StoryMap collection titled *Indigenous Pennsylvania: Past, Present and Future* went live on the Land Acknowledgment Statement (LAS) page of Gettysburg College's website.[1] As a digital mapping endeavor, a primary goal of the collection, which includes a page with an interactive Google map layer, is to spotlight places of Indigenous presence in a settler nation state where such presence is often erased. As we will describe, this primary goal goes hand-in-hand with the larger objective to serve as an Open Educational Resource (OER) that is grounded in re-thinking the very process of visualizing maps and thus, their role in how we might imagine our relations to the environment. Specifically, as an ecomedia project, *Indigenous Pennsylvania* turns to growing scholarship in Indigenous cartographies to foreground spatial and temporal mediations that offer us a storied sense of Indigenous place-based relations. In this chapter, we trace how Indigenous cartographies situate *Indigenous Pennsylvania* as an example of *d-ecomedia*, a shorthand we offer for ecomedia projects that foreground decolonial methodologies.[2]

Before we turn to Indigenous cartographies, it is worth spotlighting the immediate imperative that shapes this endeavor—Gettysburg College's recent move to incorporate a LAS. The LAS is a first for our institution as well as for other colleges and universities here in the south central part of the U.S. state of Pennsylvania. Those of us working on this initiative recognize it as long overdue to acknowledge Indigenous peoples' connections to the lands we currently occupy—specifically that these are "the traditional homelands of the Susquehannock/Conestoga, Seneca and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Leni Lenape, Shawnee and other Indigenous Nations" and that "these connections continue today" (Land Acknowledgment Committee, 2021). At the same time, given that LASs often pay nothing more than lip service to Indigenous peoples' experiences of historical and contemporary (dis)enfranchisement, we are acutely aware of the pitfalls of mere performativity, especially in light of recent work that reveals how colleges and universities in the United States are complicit in land grabs instigated by the Morrill Act of 1862. The act appropriated stolen Indigenous lands designated as "public domain" lands for the nation's burgeoning land-grant universities (Lee and Ahtone, 2020; Lomawaima et al., 2021; Sobo, Lambert, and Lambert, 2020).

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Despite these criticisms, there are many who champion LAS initiatives when done carefully. Sobo, Lambert and Lambert (2020) write that keeping an unflinching focus on Indigenous pasts, presents and futures in ways that are informative *and* empower Indigenous voices can engender "respect and restoration" of Indigenous relations to stolen lands. One approach to do this work is through digital mapping. As geographer Mark Palmer writes in the special issue of the *Journal of Native American and Indigenous Studies* focused on land-grant universities, in such initiatives, digital mapping can be a powerful means to engender restorative attention:

> Mapping for accountability creates a context for discussing past injustices and contributions of Native people to land-grant universities, as well as thinking about ways to achieve remedies and reciprocity.
>
> (2021, 109–10)

Gettysburg College, like many settler institutions, can do better to "map for accountability." It is not a land-grant institution, and while it proudly advertises its foundation by anti-slavery advocate Thaddeus Stevens, it has done little to acknowledge its occupation on stolen Indigenous lands or interrogate how it remains complicit in upholding norms of racial discrimination (Bias Awareness Resource Committee, 2021). The *Indigenous Pennsylvania* StoryMaps project is a small step toward the on-going process of building relations of "respect and restoration." We also offer it as a cartographic model of d-ecomedia to the field of ecomedia studies.

Before we turn to the particulars of how, it is important to note that *Indigenous Pennsylvania* is an undergraduate senior honors thesis conducted by Sarah and advised by her faculty mentor, Salma (the two co-authors of this chapter). Neither researcher identifies as Indigenous, however, we bring Salma's many years of working with Indigenous collaborators on ecomedia studies projects to inform the project. Specifically, as described in the introduction of *Indigenous Pennsylvania*, the project is guided by Indigenous intellectual and activist voices as is essential to decolonial methodologies (Gilsoul, 2022). We discuss potentials and challenges of attempting such decolonial work within the context of institutional LAS initiatives.

Why Mapping for Accountability Matters

In his recent *Media+Environment* article, Greg Lowen-Trudeau (2021) reminds us that maps, much like all mediated representations, can fit within educational scholar Elliot Eisner's (2002) theory of the three curricula—the explicit, the implicit and the null:

> In a cartographic context, the explicit curriculum comprises the geographical, political, and cultural features explicitly included in a given map. The null is what is not shown at all through intention or ignorance. The implicit curricula are the lessons that are implied through the explicit and the null.

Settler colonial cartographies usually make explicit the geopolitical spatial boundaries of ownership and modes of access (e.g., state lines, private vs. public property, and roads). Such features are often decoupled from their complex sociocultural and ecological histories and depict "space as universal, homogenized, and devoid of human experience" (Pearce and Louis, 2008). Such cartographies, borrowing media scholars Candis Callison (Tahtan) and Mary Lynn Young's phrasing, legitimize the authority of a "view from nowhere" (Callison and Young, 2019). As geographers Margaret Pearce and Renee Louis (2008) note, colonial mapping is often "inscriptive" or veneers

of "objectivity" where the map is understood as a static, stand-alone final product. In contrast, Indigenous cartographies are generally "process-oriented," that is they place emphasis on the relations involved in mapping—"stories expressed in the meanings, connections, and interrelationships of those place names" (Pearce and Louis, 2008). For example, "the map extends from the community into the landscape through inscriptions on trees and rocks, drawings on the ground, or dance and ceremony … [and] *emphasize[s] experienced space, or place*" (Pearce and Louis, 2008, 110).[3]

Even when settler colonial cartographies map places as community experiences, they usually do so in ways that expunge or de-contextualize Indigenous relations to the land. Such a de-contextualized example exists in close proximity to Gettysburg College, on the famed Gettysburg Military Park, a designated national park that maps the experiences of one of the most iconic moments in the history of the United States (the turning point of the American Civil War). One can visit the park and experience it through tours that narrate the battle via audio, waysides and other monuments on the landscape. Along Hancock Avenue, a crucial stretch in the park's narrative tour of the battle, there is a monument dedicated by the 42nd New York Infantry, known as the "Tammany Regiment" (Figure 26.1).

It features an imposing granite pedestal on which a metal-cast Native American stands in front of a teepee; he is buck-skin clad, feathered and clasping a bow. It is the only such explicit gesture to Native presence on the battlefield. Erected by the Society of Tammany (also known as the Columbian Order), a self-identified fraternal order of White settlers who modeled their "Americanness"

Figure 26.1 Two views of the Tammany Regiment monument on Hancock Avenue on the Gettysburg National Military Park—looking north, and looking south with the Pennsylvania monument in the background.

on requirements of "native birth," the statue mythologizes Lenape Chief Tamanend as the noble savage who peaceably welcomed William Penn to America (New York Public Library, 2021). Unlike other landmarks mapped along this section (like the Pennsylvania Monument) that are part of the park's official tour, visitors have to dig to learn this context. Most passing by might briefly wonder, "who is this impressive figure?"; some might think, "why is he wielding a bow when the war was fought with guns?" and yet, all will soon be drawn away from such "distracting" thoughts to engage instead the park's more explicitly narrated features of this battle—the strategies of Confederate and Union generals commanding their troops in a patriotic struggle to determine the future of the United States of America.

Mapped onto the land within such settler colonial contexts, the Tammany Regiment statue mirrors the critiques Sobo, Lambert and Lambert (2020) level at LAS: it is "little more than [a] feel-good public gesture signaling ideological conformity…" The mythologized appropriation of a welcoming noble savage nulls any sense of genocide suffered by Lenape peoples as settlers encroached on their lands. Standing as a cipher in a place commemorating stories of patriotism to the nation, its presence—barely visible on the region's maps—does little justice to the complicated story of Chief Tamanend and his peoples' relations to their homelands as well as their dispossession by the settler state.

Such settler colonial cartographies that null Indigenous presence are common across the state of Pennsylvania, which contains no state or federally recognized Indigenous lands. Instead, features on the land, like Tammany Monument, Conestoga township and Big Indian Rock in the Susquehanna River, signal settler appropriations that do little to acknowledge Native peoples' contemporary connections to these lands and/despite legacies of brutal dispossession. The examples referred to in the last sentence demand a re-framing to demonstrate how, as the Gettysburg College's Land Acknowledgment notes, "these connections continue today" and are not merely hauntings of pre-colonial occupation. As a decolonial act, such re-framing involves approaching the very process of mapping through strategies of interpretation and theories of cartography that are grounded in Indigenous, not Western, epistemologies. They require a process-oriented and relational framework, which we discuss below.

Socio-Ecological Conceptions of Space and Time in Indigenous Cartographies

Indigenous Pennsylvania: Past, Present and Future is conceptualized as a digital mapping project grounded in Indigenous cartographic scholarship. Lowen-Trudeau's *Media+Environment* article cited above provides a rich overview of the field, drawing our attention to how such cartographies are understood variously as "countermapping," or "mapping back" (when they superimpose Indigenous epistemologies on Western style maps) and "communocentric"—when they "diverge from Western cartographic practices in favor of more locally and culturally relevant representations" (Lowan-Trudeau, 2021). As he notes, often Indigenous cartographies combine both modes of representation—countermapping and communocentric.

This combination is central to Indigenous cartographers working with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools, which, as Pearce and Louis note, while developed within Western paradigms, are "flexible and capable to being adapted to suit traditional Indigenous cultural geographies" (Pearce and Louis, 2008, 113). In particular, the continued development of Environmental Systems Research Institute's (ESRI) StoryMaps as a "trans-media" tool where "maps … could be combined with multimedia content and woven into new, immersive experiences" (Carroll, 2019) is one that lends itself well to Indigenous conceptions of space as "storied" versus as a "view from nowhere."

We chose the StoryMaps tool for the *Indigenous Pennsylvania* project for this reason and also for its ease of use. In doing so, we looked to a number of existing projects as exemplars while prioritizing a website with a relatively low carbon footprint (Peel, 2021). *Mapping Indigenous L.A.* (2022), a collaborative project led by Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Seneca) at the University of California, Los Angeles inspires our own map because as Indigenous studies scholar Siobhan Senier writes, "Nobody can visit *Mapping Indigenous L.A.* without seeing immediately that Indigenous people, spaces, and traditions are not static objects or pinpoints but living, dynamic, and future-oriented entities" (Senier, 2018). Given that our LAS seeks to spotlight "connections that continue today," this sense of Indigenous presence as "living and dynamic" is a guiding process-oriented principle—both in acknowledging Indigenous presence as an on-going process of survivance and in framing our mapmaking as an on-going dialogue with Indigenous intellectual thought and practice.[4]

Much like *Mapping Indigenous L.A.*, and other Indigenous mapping projects, our StoryMaps Collection makes full use of text, images and audio and video multimedia to generate what Senier describes as "narrative mapping" (Indigenous Mapping Workshop, n.d.; Senier, 2018). Our StoryMaps Collection includes a main menu to navigate through several pages. One of the pages includes a map with a "bird's-eye view." We do this deliberately to, as geographer Palmer reminds us, note that Indigenous cartography doesn't reject the tools of Western mapping but rather incorporates it into a different frame of context (Palmer, 2021). Our map allows visitors to orient sites in "how the crow flies" geospatial relation to each, *and* it does more. Clicking on any of these locations pulls up the side-bar scroll, which presents a textual synopsis and links to another page, which is rich with multimedia that deliberately *re*-presents the location as entangled in storied relations occurring in place *and through time*.

In other words, temporal relations become as central to this mapping project as are spatial ones. *Mapping Indigenous L.A.* (and Senior's review of it) provide a strong justification for attending to time, reminding us of the importance of "countermapping" settler colonial representations of Indigenous people as primitive hauntings. *Indigenous Pennsylvania's* multimedia provides rich evidence of Indigenous presence existing on a continuum into the present. Whether it's a quote from a Tuscarora student on Gettysburg's campus incorporated into the text, audio from an interview with an Onondaga activist and organizer who calls our region home, or images and video of the three sister's garden (corn, beans and squash) planted on campus, the project unequivocally reminds us that Indigenous collaborators are alive and part of the process of what Goeman has described as (re)mapping—that is, "remembering important connections to land and community" through the act of storytelling (Goeman, 2013, 29).

Grounding the project in such Indigenous collaborations reaffirms our desire to showcase Indigenous conceptions of temporality. Specifically, we organize our narratives regarding each place not as chronologically linear, but, rather, as what Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) has described as "spiraling": a sense of "intergenerational time" that captures:

> the varied experiences of time that we have as participants within living narratives involving our ancestors and descendants. Experiences of spiraling time, then, may be lived through narratives of cyclicality, reversal … The spiraling narratives unfold through our interacting with, responding to and reflecting on the actual or potential actions and viewpoints of our ancestors and descendants. They unfold as continuous dialogues.
>
> (2018, 228)

Thus, for example, we could have represented the Conestoga massacre of 1763 that haunts the Fulton Theatre in downtown Lancaster (located as the bird flies approximately 60 miles east of

Gettysburg) as one isolated historical moment in the settler nation's founding. Instead, we spotlight the multimedia and graphic novel project, *The Ghost River: Rise and Fall of Conestoga* (2019). Spearheaded by Will Fenton for the Library Company of Philadelphia, authored by Lee Francis IV (Laguna Pueblo), the owner of Red Planet, the largest Indigenous comic book retailer in the United States, and showcasing the remarkable work of illustrator Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva), *The Ghost River* is a collaboration with local Pennsylvanian Natives and an exploration of the on-going meanings of this massacre from Indigenous points of view. For example, in one snippet of our video interview with her, MaryAnn Robins (Onondaga), the president of the local Native group, the Circle Legacy Center and a consultant for *The Ghost River* project, reflects on the intergenerational continuum of trauma imposed by such events on Native peoples into the present. Linking such video snippets to audio clips from an interview with Fenton and to the website of the project itself, our StoryMap's narrative further contextualizes how such reflections become spaces for on-going healing. Much like *The Ghost River* project itself, which is available online as a free educational resource for school and college classrooms, *Indigenous Pennsylvania* seeks to generate an open space for inter- and intra-generational dialogues all too often silenced by the settler state, including by its formal educational systems.

While *Indigenous Pennsylvania* refuses chronological linear time as an ordering structure for its narrative mapping, it remains faithful to Indigenous epistemologies that center place-based learning as socio-ecologically entangled. The navigation menu and the interactive map emphasize locations, and the narratives of each page attend to place as a web of human and more-than-human relations. For example, As Robins points out in her video interview regarding *The Ghost River* project, including "river" in the title of that project was no coincidence—it reminds us of the vitality of the Susquehanna River to the lifeways of the Conestoga peoples (Robins, 2021). In our StoryMap Collection, ecological groundings interwoven with sociocultural lifeways remain a central theme. For example, the page describing the Painted Turtle Farm, a college-owned farm, illuminates the agroecology and culture of local Indigenous planting practices. Pointing out how the three sisters—corn, beans and squash—are understood as sentient, reciprocal beings, the page narrates stories of colonially enforced food dispossession and the continuing fight for Indigenous food sovereignty.

In addition, the project actively works to put individual sites into a relational context with other places to remind us how these particularized places exist in larger matrices of socio-ecological influence, Native and colonial. Thus, for example, while the Fulton Theatre page references the Big Indian Rock page (and vice versa) to situate the river as a regional connective tissue, all pages also narrate and use the digital hyperlink feature to cast a wider geospatial and temporal net. Such a move is a constant reminder of similar Native experiences across the nation state and situates our region within collective community networks of resistance and resurgence.

In all, *Indigenous Pennsylvania: Past, Present and Future* seeks to unbury "past injustices and contributions of Native peoples… as well as [to] think about ways to achieve remedies and reciprocity" (Palmer, 2021, 109–10). It draws on historical and contemporary Indigenous scholarship and local collaborations to deploy decolonizing methodologies that are process-oriented and relational in its framing. As we discuss below in our concluding remarks, there are specific challenges to this work within the context of institutional LAS initiatives.

Conclusions

When Gettysburg College committed to a LAS, the glaring absence of a coherent (co)curriculum that helps the campus (and local) community understand what it means to occupy Indigenous lands

fueled our desire to make visible the rich and continuing relations that Indigenous peoples have with these lands.[5] The college's institutional license to ESRI's StoryMaps tool facilitated a way to generate a publicly accessible means to visualize this work. In conducting this representational work, we are very cognizant of the need to, as Theresa Stewart-Ambo (Tongva/Luiseño) writes, "move beyond the rhetoric" to "materialize … tribal-university relationships" (Stewart-Ambo, 2021, 166). The *Indigenous Pennsylvania: Present, Past, and Future* project is founded on generating ongoing, on-the-ground collaborations with local Native members that extend beyond the map to community engagements of respect and restoration. Yet, there is a rub. The map itself, as noted at the start of this chapter, is an undergraduate student's honors thesis. As a senior thesis project, it is time bound to a year. Because each chosen site is dense with researched and original content, there are currently only four locations featured. We know that there are many more within our region, and while we envision the project being picked up by other students once Sarah graduates, there is no surety of this. This is because at the institutional level there is as yet no formal administrative guarantee of support to the LAS other than the promise to ensure the "practice of reciting the statement at major campus events" (President's Office, 2021).

The formal language raises red flags for the LAS more broadly, and within it, the viability of a digital mapping project like *Indigenous Pennsylvania*. Both are dependent on more concerted institutional support to survive in ways that do more than, as we have noted, lip service to the cause. Much like community relations, digital projects require care and attention to thrive. At a logistical level, as Senior writes, "Like many digital projects of this size, maintenance over time becomes an issue" (Senier, 2018, 947). Parts of the current mapping toolbox going defunct are part and parcel of how digital technologies function today—links need to be constantly checked as the internet re-calibrates its available content; as ESRI constantly updates its StoryMap software, glitches can develop in the existing design. At the same time, this particular project is envisioned with what Senier notes is the advantage of such web-based digital publications—it is meant to be a space for "continually expanding authorship, recursiveness, and revision" (2018, 949) to best reflect the process of growing relations with Indigenous partners in ways that can, as Sobo, Lambert and Lambert (2020) note, "respect and restore." This process-oriented framework requires institutional commitment.

Knowing that institutional challenges exist, we pin our hopes for the project's continued part in productive relationalities that our LAS can grow, if done right. Specifically, while the mapping project is primarily shepherded by the two of us, our work is part of the broader mission of a dedicated group of faculty, students and staff who constitute the LAS committee. The committee is intently focused on capacity building. For example, because Sarah's project is research based we reached out to the Provost's Office, which extended co-sponsorship for an on-campus event that featured the *The Ghost River* project collaborators through a small Mellon grant. Twelve other departments and programs across campus signed on as well. The success of this event has fueled additional institutional possibilities. Since then the LAS committee has worked actively on a number of curricular and co-curricular initiatives, which we showcase on the timeline on college's LAS homepage (LAS Timeline, 2021–Present). We hope that these will pave the way for more substantial support that can, as Stewart-Ambo notes, extend "external, economic, curricular, and cocurricular relationships existing between American Indian nations and universities that recognize, reinforce, and respect tribal sovereignty and self-determination" (Stewart-Ambo, 2021, 166). As an Indigenous cartographic project, *Indigenous Pennsylvania* plays a small part in a larger, process-oriented framework of relations that not only involve real challenges but also exciting possibilities for d-ecomedia practice and theory.

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Notes

1 On this page, the link resides under the sub-head Indigenous Resources: https://www.gettysburg.edu/offices/diversity-inclusion/land-acknowledgement-statement/#indigenous-resources.
2 Salma's current monograph project *Indigenous Ecocinema: Decolonizing Media Environments* (forthcoming) outlines the idea of d-ecocinema, which shines a spotlight on cinema's ecological and decolonial possibilities, an idea she has presented in many conference presentations. Here we extend the terminology to all media, hence the term d-ecomedia.
3 We have added the italicized emphasis on experienced space.
4 Survivance as forwarded by Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) in his seminal *Manifest Manners: Narratives of Post Indian Survivance* (1994) indicates a sense of Native agency beyond simple survival and instead as a marker of positive endurance.
5 There is no Native Studies program on campus; and in terms of co-curriculum activity, we have the recently formed the Land Acknowledgment Committee and the student club, Students for Indigenous Awareness.

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