

An Atlas for a Shared Future

JOSHUA M. NASON

The University of Texas at Arlington

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This paper presents and proposes a cartographic teaching of empathy, inclusion, and sharing of place. Through developing a multi-media technological atlas that would exhibit the potential fruitfulness of highlighted multiplicities already found in shared places, this paper looks for ways to represent land as a better representation of its many inhabitants – human and otherwise.

MAPPING AS PROJECTION

Land is represented. Land is representative. Land is representation.

Throughout the “civilizing” histories and processes of human expansion, the claiming and taming of land has involved the drawing thereof. As explorers moved into new territories, they, often accompanied by cartographers, would extend the staking of their claims not just through posts and fences or flags and forts, but through the drawing, naming, and defining of territories they encountered and encapsulated. The commandeering of land through both drawn and written lines dates to the earliest of human settlements and the map has long been a device through which land was sequestered and sovereignty established.

In James Corner’s seminal *The Agency of Mapping*, he deftly explains a powerful duality of the map. “The analogous-abstract character of the map surface means that it is doubly projective: it both captures the projected elements off the ground and projects back a variety of effects through use. The strategic use of this double function has, of course, a long alliance with the history of mapping.”¹ Through this ability to be “doubly projective” the map speaks of the here and now and the consequences to follow. It draws presence in actuality and intention.

Through the history of mapping, drawing land has held multiple functions and values. For early cartographers and explorers, it abstractly conveyed the vastness of unknown landscapes they encountered. It was a documenting practice describing what was seen and arrived upon, many times so that it could be returned to. In this, mapping was a process of finding place. Maps,

also though their construction, gave claim to that land as a material manifestation of presence and preeminence. Through this, mapping acted as a process of defining place. For some, mapping must also be performative.² Not merely representing the known or preexistent, maps must draw that which is open, that which is yet to be. Maps are tools of design, actions of creation.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, while describing the Rhizome in the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus*, assert “The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious.”³ They continue to describe its requisite manipulability, “The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation.”⁴

When mapping attains this higher quality, of intention and execution it is projective. However, through all of these, mapping communicates not just place but also the relationship of the mapper and/or the mappee(s) to the mapped. As the representational lines of the land are drawn, so are the powerful lines of representation. Simply put, lines can become walls, both literally and figuratively.

MAPPING AS CIVILIZATION

On the road to civilization, the circumscription of an early human community by a wall was a pivotal moment in its evolution into a formal city. It marked their collective interiority and protection from every danger that lay outside their wall. While the specific dangers varied for each city, an overly simplistic summation of those dangers could be “the wild.” Simply put, those within the city felt the need to be bound in by a wall that kept out the dangerous (so-called) wild—or wilderness—whether that dangerous wild be other people, animals, or the fear of the unknown, the uncivilized.

Unfortunately, these notions and tactics of excluding the wild included excluding other peoples, particularly when land was taken from groups that had lived on and even cultivated that land for generations but were no longer deemed civilized enough to ‘own’ it. Humanity has found every reason imaginable to steal,



Figure 1. Tabulae Peutingerianae segmentum primum (on left) and V and VI (on right). Unknown Author (possibly many), ca. 1200.

envelope, and commodify land – extracting from it every value it could whether it be resource, capital, or power. Wars over land rights by both neighbors and neighboring countries is nothing new and yet unfathomably persists today (so much so, that one could colloquially describe war on and over the natural as “human nature”). Through such antiquated practices, people are killed, and land is decimated. In order to reverse such idiocy, we must find better ways to understand our relationships to one another through the lands we share.

MAPPING AS REPRESENTATION

Perhaps one of the very tools used to enclose and privatize land could be a key to open and share them. If the cartographer is willing to appropriate the tools of claiming and division, contemporary maps, along with other means of representation, particularly those digitally exhibited in public forum, hold the potential to represent land as a shared resource. By using online or application-based tools, maps can give access and credit to those connected with lands. Lands can be shown as the variable, inclusive, and vital resources they are, homes for advancing understanding of exchange and value beyond commodity or colonialism. Not as bait for power exchanges or personal-wealth/value extraction but as common-ground places for intra-personal and intra-cultural exchanges and the sharing of community values.

To fully commit to this tool reappropriation, one must understand that mapping is more than mere drawings of land as object. Mediums and options must be expanded to deepen the understanding and methods of drawing place to include histories and potential futures, to include all voices linked to a place, and to give viewers the ability to toggle and self-curate the information in order to absorb the vitality of place through its translation.

When incorporated into classrooms and community dialogues, such tools transform from mere exhibits of representations into

moments of effective representation. These tools in the hands of students give them access to expand their understanding not only of context in a physical sense but also in terms of their poignancy as tools for change and advocacy.

Place is powerful when conceived as a shared condition for connectedness and co-representation.

Representation is empowering when its linguistic duality is more fully confronted and conflated - when it speaks of visual communication that advocates for the needs and values of the affectable.⁵

Etymologically, “representation,” derives from the Latin *repraesentare*, which means “to depict or make present something that which is absent.”⁶ So, what then should be represented by a quality map? If, according to Deleuze, Guattari, and Corner, a real map must be projective - and if, according to its very meaning, it must depict something absent to be representative/representational, a map that introduces its readers to future coexistence of lesser-known histories and truths held within a place must have value. But to do so, the map must venture beyond its traditional frame and into new mediums more adept at telling multiple stores simultaneously.

MAPPING AS MEDIUM

A single piece of land holds the history of many families and peoples throughout time. For each, a compendium could be assembled to tell the various stories of people and place linked to any given spot. However, the effort and material necessary to collect such volumes requires attention and priority reserved for the places with the most stories to tell. The trick is how to tell such varying and, at times, conflicting stories.

While traditional cartography has proven useful in weaving complex tales, tasks such as these require more mediums to

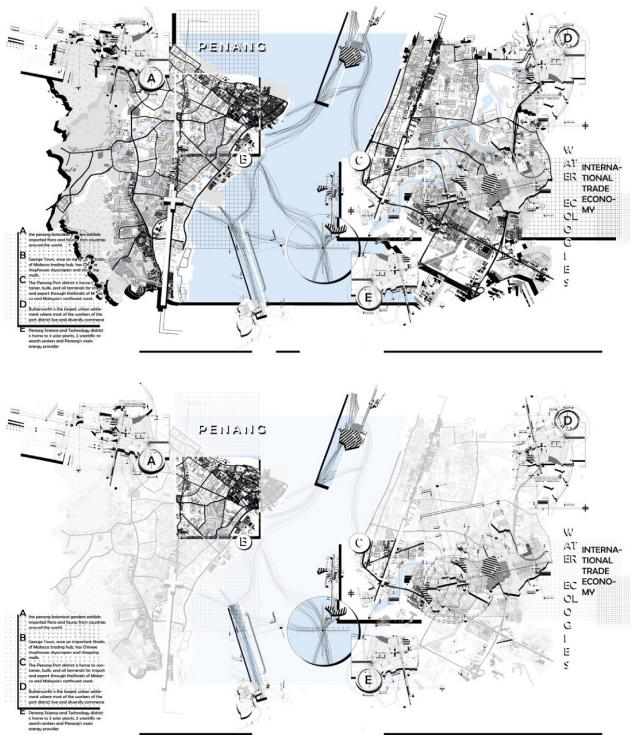


Figure 2. Penang International Trade Economy. Brandon Paredes.

be brought together to tell all related stories in editable and relatable fashion.

Using contemporary information and communication technologies, digital cartographic collection of curatable drawings, images, videos, virtual inhabitations, time-lapse recreations, models, story-telling, and historical accounts could allow all of those vested within that singular place to share and exchange the values they place on that place. Such a repository becomes a virtual community-hall where one can learn of the others who have lived in and cared for a place. Such shared inhabitation can preserve the land from destruction, extract it from conflict, and prepare it for an inclusive and decolonized future. Such technologies also give educational access to those working in design fields as a means for understanding the nuanced and complicated histories of place as it impacts all involved.

Such varied inhabitation advocates for the people of the land as much as it does for the land itself. Instead of a singular narrative line written or drawn by the “victors”⁷ of an exchange, the ability to include every involved voice provides a more complete, representative history of people in place—another example of virtual representation and technological empowerment through education.

MAPPING AS PEDAGOGY

Over the past decade, I have integrated mapping into my design studios to help students understand the context, complexity, and consequences of their work. Mapping has been a crucial

tool in idea generation and project communication due to its ability to draw connections between and communicate the interdependence of the many parts and impacts of projects. However, normative mapping began to stall in its ability to explore the untold, unknown, and unconstructed narratives of the project’s sites and eventual potential for design work to embrace the complexity of work open to variable influences. To reverse this stagnation, we began to explore the potential of multimedia drawings and models of projects in site to tell more full stories and understand more real consequences of our work.

Much of this work has centered around national lands, particularly land overseen by the National Park Service. Many of these sites, both parks and monuments have contested and untidy histories of ownership and sovereignty.^{89 10} Under the auspices of land stewardship and conservation, this land was collected, categorized, and designated as public – to be had and shared by all. However, not everyone is/was amenable to the establishment of parks or to the preservation of land as seemingly sacrosanct and sequestered from development or inhabitation.¹¹ Such complicated histories give students insight into the role and potential of design to advocate for those who have not been heard. This fosters opportunity for teamwork, in-depth research, and the building of empathy. It also can generate proposals focused on the sharing of land both literally through built work and digitally through archival processes of narrative exhibition and idea dissemination.

MAPPING AS PRECEDENT

Fort Davis National Historic Site in west Texas is a fertile example for students of how complicated even a comparatively simple parcel of national land can be as a place of many narratives, influences, and histories. Established in 1854 and named after secretary of war Jefferson Davis, was initially intended as a remote military outpost and rest stop providing protection and retreat for emigrants, travelers, and post shipments headed across the Trans-Pecos region now known as the Texas plains.¹² Since 1960, it has been a national historic site commemorating its short but eventful life as a base until 1891. Before its designation as a frontier outpost, the land was home to various peoples and subjected to several exchanges in sovereignty.

Its many people include numerous indigenous groups, particularly the Mescalero Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa peoples who had occupied or migrated through the region for over 10,000 years.¹³ They lived on, cultivated, and protected the land for centuries before anyone else arrived. It was the native Hasinai people who named the area, *táyshá* (translated later to Texas), which means “friends”¹⁴ long before colonizers from France and Spain entered the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, claiming control over the land, virtually connecting the Americas to Europe through the declarations of expansionist sovereignty.^{15 16} The area was controlled by Mexico from 1821 until its emancipation in 1836, becoming the independent republic of Texas until it was peacefully annexed by the US in 1845,



Figure 3. National Historic Site Photos and Map. Daniel Driensky and Sarah Reyes (photos), Ryan Playle (Map).

signifying yet another boundary change and sovereign claim. A year later, the Mexican American War began over more border and expansion disputes between the countries, bringing violent exchanges in the years that followed.¹⁷ Everything changed for a land that had lain relatively unbounded for more than 10,000 years, when in under the next 200 it witnessed several exchanges of control through virtually every means imaginable. While the area still resembled its pre-Columbian self, the rules of engagement had dramatically shifted. However, the changes had only begun.

After being built the fort was home to the Eighth US Infantry until the onset of the Civil War when Texas, a young state of only fifteen years, seceded from the union and become the seventh state in the New Confederacy. Upon this resolution, the US Infantry evacuated the fort, which soon became an outpost for Confederate troops.¹⁸ Of note, an estimated 20,000 Mexican descendants served in the Civil War on both sides, many of whom hailed from and served in Texas, some at Fort Davis.¹⁹ After the Civil War ended, Confederate forces abandoned Fort Davis, which was then hardly used for a few years. From 1867-1891 the US Cavalry moved back in, this time assigning the Ninth and then Tenth Calvaries, both units of African American regiments, known as Buffalo Soldiers, to this post.²⁰ After laying vacant for 70 years, Fort Davis became a National Historic Site under the

National Park Service in 1961 and has since been partially restored, exhibiting both remaining buildings and ruins from some of the demolished structures.²¹

While the historical site physically exhibits buildings from thirty-seven-year history of the fort's active life, its collection has been expanded to include some of the other stories of exchanges of land, inhabitation, and sovereignty integral to this place. Over its history, this base has been home to various voices of interest and importance. Fort Davis is a lesson in the necessary inclusion and role of conflicting narratives in telling the story of a place that has been home to so many. One cannot simply tell the tale of the soldiers at the base as a clean, linear tale of seamless property transactions while ignoring everything and everyone else. One cannot ignore the assumed sovereignty imposed upon claimed land, nor the injustice and exploits represented therein. Nor can one presumptively label some inhabitants good and others as bad. Fort Davis is more complicated than that in every way imaginable—a bound and re-bound tract, a remote outpost leveraged as a representation of reach and power, a collection of stories with as many layers as the stone cliffs at its back.

MAPPING AS ASSIGNMENT

Assigning students to draw and redraw this site has proven vital to their understanding these layers and their meaning. Not only

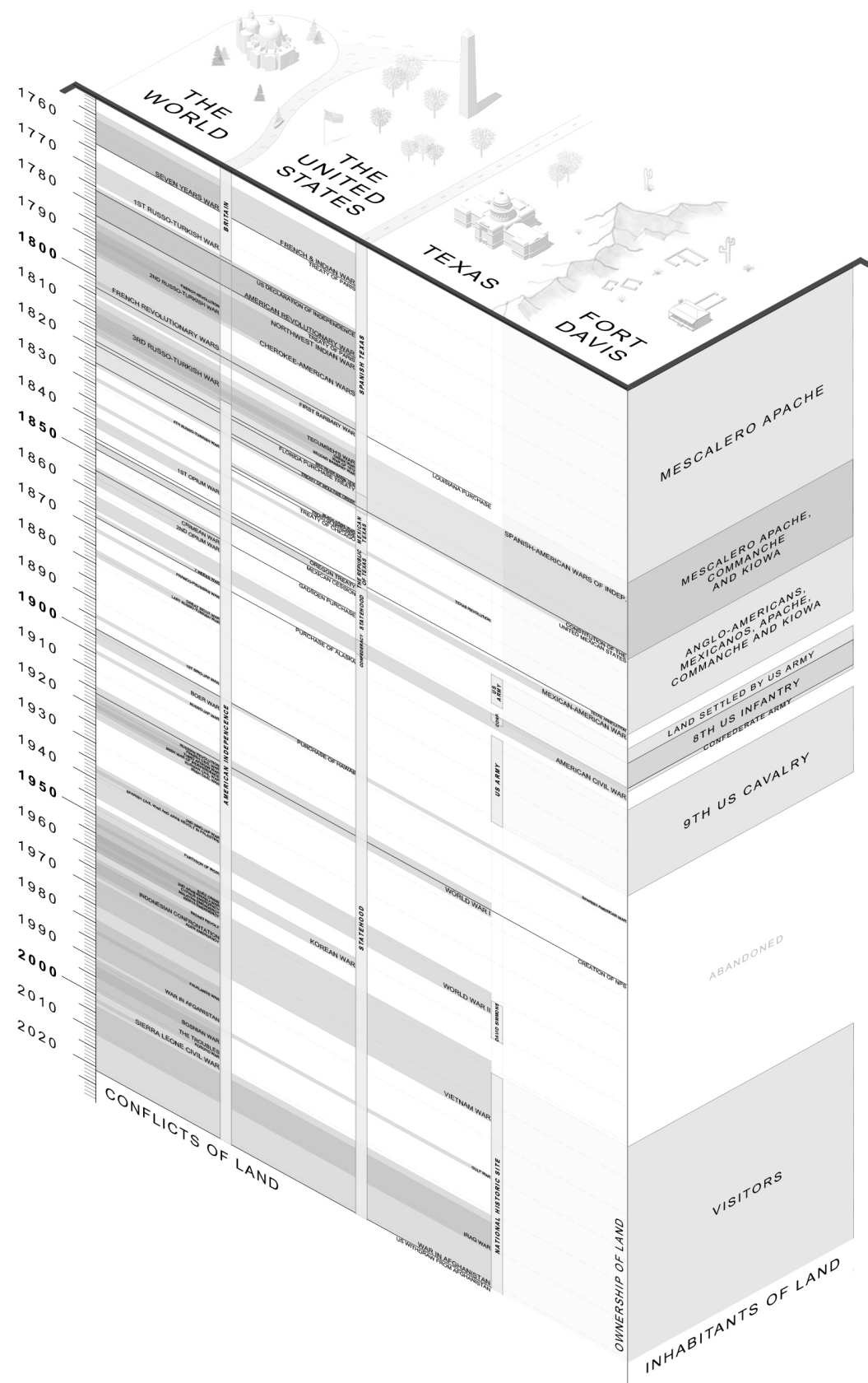


Figure 4. Land Conflict, Sovereignty, and Inhabitation for Fort Davis at scales and over time. Rachel Barrett.

for the history of this secluded site but as a charge for their careers moving forward. Careers aware of the voices integral to place and their rights to be represented in and alongside it. Beyond drawing, models, collages, videos, photographs, LiDAR scans, VR recordings, and more are being completed and layered to develop an immersive online interpretive atlas in partnership with the National Parks Service to expand their reach and educational programs to include the less-heard voices of this land.

Through this work, the physical site will be documented and collected into digital repository available to all for virtual and in situ visits. This collection then becomes curated as a multimedia atlas of this place, both as presently constructed as well as in its past, pre-fort, state. Within this atlas, the stories of as many possible past inhabitants can be told as linked to the place as it was found in their specific time through various drawn, built, and recorded means.

This project's goals directly benefit various groups. First, the digital conservation and curation of the site at Fort Davis will preserve important historic buildings in digital form before they fall, telling the story of this built place and the adobe construction techniques used to build it. The digital preservation of this site is essential in understanding how these structures can be examined for possible maintenance and repair. Virtual accessibility benefits the public by giving access to those unable to visit the site and educating the public on the meaning of this site and its people, bringing forth the voices of influence and sharing this inclusive, integrated history. The public is benefitted by connections to the fort and land through the preservation of the fort's and area's social and historical narratives. It expands knowledge and engagement with this place by developing a varied and inclusive digital interface through which people can learn about and engage with this remote place through the voices of those often unheard at such sites. Of particular significance is highlighting the voices of Fort Davis' BIPOC inhabitants and recognizing their stories and influence. There is also the potential for such methods to be replicated at other battlefields and national lands, establishing a new methodology for digital conservation and curation of historic sites as a low-cost, long-term adjacency to physical restoration. Lastly, involved students learn not only the skills involved in such work and the content of this particular place, but also work on a socially minded project giving one example of the inclusive, community-building influence design can have.

While this work is modest in nature and only the beginning – a partial and imperfect beginning at that – it hopefully gives an example of ways we, as designers and educators can use our skills and resources to connect people with place and include and advocate for those who have not yet had their crucial voices fully heard.

MAPPING AS COMMON GROUND

Multiple narratives could be overlayed within the environments in order give voice to all those who have interacted with that place, fostering equity and insight into multiple possible readings of each place for experts and visitors alike. A healthier and more productive platform for contesting land emerges. Expanded notions of inhabitation are discovered. New tools for teaching content and empathy become available. This informational transportation of people not only presents them with access to new places or access to new information regarding their known places, but also fresh attitudes and expanded understanding. It builds stewardship and empathy by promoting the realization of community and interdependence. It fosters a new understanding of land as a shared resource, acknowledging all who have played a role in its shaping.

Through this, the map represents more than a designated territory, or a troubled history. It speaks to a future of shared representation and inclusion, and it presents the transformative duality of representation to both show clearly and honestly what was while also speaking to what could yet be. Jean Baudrillard, in his explanation of Jorge Luis Borges's "finest allegory of simulation," describes a "map the precedes the territory," one that becomes the forbearer to a new reality, even a state of "hyperreal."²² This collection, this Atlas for a Shared Future possesses the potential to deliver on that hyperreal, not as a slick simulation of some uncanny copy but a hyperreal that leads us into a better way of living – a way of living together with shared presence.



Figure 5. Fort Davis Digital Narrative Multimedia Atlas. Ryan Playle and Joshua M. Nason.

ENDNOTES

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