

Major Assignment 3: Networked Hi/stories

Critics like Blanca Calvo Figueras et al., and Allison Hitt explain that how we compose and the tools we use to do so allow us to “construct” space and time. Rhetoric allows us to do this by relying on notions of space and time as constructed by the composer rather than constants experienced in the same way by all people. Cultural rhetoricians remind us that we all inhabit different worlds and chronotopes; that is, we belong to many different cultures—ethnic, workplace, familial—each with its own rules for how we inhabit space, and each culture also has its own sense of how time flows. Therefore, when we compose, we have to ensure that we account for space and time according to the needs of our intended audiences.

How we tell stories—how we present information—builds space where certain bodyminds are either welcome or excluded based on the choices we make. For example, the use of [overly complicated language](#) can bar participation by people with disabilities or unfamiliar readers. Stories also engage temporality, meaning we perceive how one event follows another based on perspective. If someone does not have a particular cultural lens that reveals how one thing follows another, they may assume two events are unrelated. Consequently, revealing differences based on perspective proves crucial to challenging dominant histories that lay claim to “objective” truth since, as we note, they leave out a lot of people and can cause harm at the material and physical level.

Digital tools like StoryMap JS and Timeline JS can help us to do this work by allowing us to re-present information in ways that reconfigure space and time and share that work with public audiences in ways that essays cannot. By doing so, we can increase the potential circulation of the hi/stories we share and contemplate new ways to contest overarching narratives that continue to erase or obscure vital stories.

In this assignment, you (or you and your partner) will use StoryMap JS or Timeline JS to tell the story of a local event and contextualize it primarily across space or time. For example, you could tell the story of the birth of Zydeco music. While many people believe it started elsewhere, Zydeco was born in Houston’s own Frenchtown when several hundred Creoles of Color moved here seeking work in the 1920s. Reflecting their own complex ethnoracial heritage, musicians from Frenchtown combined influences from blues, rhythm and blues, Afro-Caribbean, Cajun, soul, and Creole music to create a lively genre now heard around the world. Using StoryMap, you could show the journey of the Creole community to Houston and/or trace Zydeco’s influences across the globe. Or, using Timeline JS, you could tell the story of how different people moved to the area or how different the different genres of music that made up Zydeco became popular over time. However, you can pick either tool depending on your project since you will have to do the same kind of contextualizing work; the main difference will be whether you choose to arrange the information spatially or temporally.

Your StoryMap or Timeline should:

- detail the event for unfamiliar audiences (**What happened? Who was involved? What communities were affected?**);
- break down the event into a sequence or spatial arrangement and note the significance of all associated actors, locations, and dates;
- widen its scope to contextualize the event within a broader cultural/social history on a national or global scale;
- suggest why many people do not know this history (**Who knows about this event and who does not? What social factors contribute to this discrepancy in “attention economy”?** **Be sure not to erase the subjectivity of those who do know!**);
- and finally, explain the importance of uncovering, recovering, and/or amplifying local stories (**How does listening to these stories attune our attention to individual communities within larger communities? How does this help us to understand how to do research at different levels of scope?**)

When finished, share your StoryMap or Timeline in the course folder.

Remember that readers will need you to:

- ✓ demonstrate a thorough understanding of the tools we use and why;
- ✓ base your (re-)presentation of the information on clear connections between all events or elements;
- ✓ present this hi/story from a new perspective, highlighting how geographical, affective, or cultural networks challenge singular narratives and perspectives;
- ✓ compose with broad public audiences in mind, making sure to avoid complicated language.

Rough draft due:

Final draft due: