1. Project Summary

“Mapping Indigenous American Cultures and Living Histories,” or MIAC-LH, is a map of Indigenous Nations funded by a Digital Advancement Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and designed to introduce and share with scholars and the general public the dynamic conditions of Indigenous social and cultural life (http://indigenousmap.org). It was created to document imperiled cultural heritage materials by constructing a prototype digital map, and a digital guide (see Janet Berry Hess, ed., Digital Mapping and Indigenous America [Routledge: 2021], https://www.amazon.com/Digital-Mapping-Indigenous-RoutledgeResearch/dp/0367272172/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=janet+berry+hess&qid=1621184190&s=books&sr=1-1), related to two pre- and post-contact American Indian tribal regions and cultures: the Osage and the Modoc (removed from California to Oregon and Oklahoma). The map constitutes an online resource for the general public, around the world, to access maps, photographs, and other data related to tribal Nations. It serves as a prototype for a future digital map comprising story narratives of all Indigenous peoples throughout the region of the United States, along with information related to linguistics, geography, history, and culture. In light of the imperiled state of language, literature, and rt—as well as the lack of understanding and curriculum related to regional and local Native cultures—the initial objective of MIAC-LH was twofold: (1) to lower barriers to accessing and publishing information related to Osage and Modoc history and culture for the benefit of people of all ages, identities/affiliations, and educational levels, and (2) to accelerate the documentation of Indigenous cultures and histories in America.

The Project Director for this project is Janet Berry Hess. Among the collaborators on the digital project were Victor Temprano, the creator of Native Land, and Pbonchai Tallman, the Paiute elder who collaborated with Dr. Hess from the first conception of the project. As MIAC-LH evolved, we received advice and assistance from a wide array of scholars and tribal officials, which will be described below.

2. Project Origins and Goals

While the Project Director was a graduate student at Harvard University, her dissertation advisor, Dr. Suzanne Blier, cochaired a project entitled Baobab, later renamed WorldMap/Africamap, now migrating to Arc GIS online (see https://worldmap.harvard.edu), housed at the Center for Geographic Analysis in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Africamap “is an online open source mapping platform for scholars who wish to explore, visualize, edit, and publish geospatial information” related to the continent of Africa, and it has received an NEH grant for enhancements and additions to its specific structure. As the Project Director undertook research for her book, Osage and Settler: Reconstructing Shared History Through an Oklahoma Family Archive (McFarland, 2016), as well as presentations on the Modoc in 2010-2014, she became aware of the need for a digital map addressing the cultures of Indigenous America. The difficulty of obtaining maps of Indigenous American nations, both pre- and post-contact, made evident to her the need for a centralized mechanism to store and share such data as language families, reservation boundaries, and areas of federal and tribal sovereignty, both for the
purposes of scholarship and for public awareness and protection of sites. Scholarship related to
the distribution of Native languages, spiritual beliefs and ceremonial practices, shifting histories
of land ownership and management, information about art practices, and other cultural
information is widely dispersed among tribal museums and archives, natural history and art
museums, private collections, academic holdings, and specialized digital resources. After
reaching out to Victor Temprano, creator of Native Land (https://native-land.ca), the Director
conceptualized a map of selected tribal Nations together with tribal regions and languages that
would serve as a prototype. Our project complements and expands upon the rich store of
existing scholarship related to Native American Studies, Cultural Studies, American History and
Art History by offering a prototype for a collaborative community resource for sharing and
viewing data, visual images, and links to videos. It serves as a bridge between GIS (geographic
information system) sites, which do not allow for wide scholarly and public participation, and
web-based mapping systems of tribal Nations and their cultures that are limited in the amount of
data supported. The dynamic and contested nature of legal and cultural decisions related to
Native Nations, and the lack of accessibility of tribally and privately held materials, often renders
traditional scholarship outdated: since the publication of the Project Director’s book, Osage and
Settler, in May 2015, for example, the Osage Nation Historic Preservation Office has added
thirty-one counties in three states to what is considered Osage ancestral land, and acquired a
major ceremonial site in St. Louis, Missouri, a “burial mound” whose ownership was contested
for decades. The fluidity and contestation of boundaries and cultural claims to sacred sites,
rendered complex by shared or overlapping areas of federal and tribal sovereignty, is
characteristic of most tribal Nations within the boundaries of the United States.

For the general public and scholars seeking information about Indigenous American
culture, this project offers the opportunity to easily access basic information on tribal Nations.
Members of the general public, including students, are able to view their territories, and click on
a data tree (containing such categories as “languages,” and “story maps”) to learn about the
presence of thriving nations, their locations, and aspects of their cultural life. The site has the
potential, when expanded in the future, to inform the public about little-understood aspects of
Native culture (the great numbers of nations still in existence, the existence of American Indian
slave trade routes, the leadership positions occupied by women), as well as Indigenous history
which could be used to benefit the nation as a collective (knowledge of local plants and
landscapes, oral histories, visual and ceremonial practices). For scholars, this data will be
universally available. The present project fills a critical gap, answering questions ranging from
the basic—are there still Native peoples? Where do they live? What languages were (and in
some cases, still are) spoken?—to scholarly inquiries about selected Nations. For nations with
story maps, questions ranging from what languages, art forms, ceremonies, and oral histories are
practiced today, to issues of memorializing sites of first contact, have been addressed.

3. Project Activities, Team, & Participants

During the time period of the Digital Advancement grant, Project Director Janet Hess and
Collaborator Pbonchai Tallman hosted digital mapmaker Victor Temprano for an initial, three
day brainstorming session. Based on this meeting, we began with a map of regional shapes of
tribal Nations and their language affiliations. Mr. Tallman and the Project Director continued
outreach, collaboration, and conference presentations for the rest of the period of the grant while
building collaborative story features and resource tabs for the map. The Project Director shared
her prototype plan at the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) conference in Minnesota in 2018 and at the American Studies Association conference in Honolulu in 2019. Mr. Tallman and the Director shared their vision at the ATALM conference in Temecula in 2019, at the Association for American Indian Studies in Albuquerque in 2018, and created a film of their project with the Sustainable Heritage Network in 2019. Mr. Tallman and the Director visited Chairman Walter Echo-Hawk at his home in Pawnee to discuss the project in 2019, and hosted Chairman Echo-Hawk at the Director’s institution in 2020 and 2021. Throughout this time period, the Director and Mr. Tallman conducted outreach to the Modoc Nations in Oregon and Oklahoma; to the Osage and Pawnee Nations in Oklahoma; and to the Pitt River Nation in northern California and Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria in Sonoma County, California.

At the same time the outreach, presentations, and collaboration took place, the Project Director worked on the accompanying guide, a peer-reviewed text submitted, written, and published during the grant period entitled “Digital Mapping and Indigenous America.” This text included chapters by a range of authors, including the creators of the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center; the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition Project; the Indigenous Digital Archive; the Miami Language Digital Tool; the Early California Cultural Atlas; the Digital Index of North American Archaeology; Pan-Inuit Trails; Native Land; the O’ahu Greenprint; and additional chapters by Daniel Cole, D.R. Fraser Taylor, and Rebekah Ingram, as well as a chapter by Sarah Montoya on Mapping Indigenous L.A. and Carrying Our Ancestors Home, and a chapter on MIAC-LH itself. “Digital Mapping and Indigenous America” also had a substantial Appendix containing additional resources: digital mapping projects; repatriation, reconciliation, and healing digital resources; language resources; organizations and museums; tribal archives and institutions; grants and fellowships; and children’s resources.

There were several challenges during the course of the grant that were beyond the MIAC-LH’s control. The Project Director’s friend and contact among the Osage, Paula Farid, member of the Five Woman Council, unexpectedly passed away, and progress ceased with the Osage Nation. Due to historic flooding in Oklahoma, followed by the pandemic, the Director and Mr. Tallman were unable to revisit the Modoc Nation for collaboration, and our collaborator in the Oklahoma Modoc Nation tribal office retired. In the absence of this collaboration, we were ethically obliged to look elsewhere for tribal narratives. Fortunately, our conference presentations and travel resulted in meeting with Chairman Walter Echo-Hawk, and he approved our story narrative focused on art history and the law for the Pawnee Nation; we also collaborated with Buffy McQuillen, the THPO for the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, in telling the story of first contact. We recorded Mr. Tallman reciting a prayer in the ancient form of Yaqui to begin telling the story of the Yaqui people, resulting in more tribal Nation coverage than initially proposed. With the funding that could not be spent on travel due to COVID-19 restrictions, the team hired Alicia de Recontre-Silva, an ATALM affiliate, to collect information on non-tribal museums and institutions with Native holdings to add to the MIAC-LH map, a fine prototype of institutions and resources for a future Level II map.

4. Project Outcomes

By the conclusion of the grant period, working with the unexpected restrictions of the pandemic, the MIAC-LH team was able to achieve far more than initially proposed. We created a prototype digital map of the continental U.S. with tribal region shapes, languages, focus story narratives on
three tribal Nations (primarily the Pawnee Nation and Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, but also a beginning to the Yaqui narrative), and tabs indicating research resources, tribal resources, and resources for children, as well as locations of significant non-tribal institutions with Native holdings. The story narratives contain tribal histories, photographs, links to other resources, videos, and moving maps focusing on tribally approved narratives. To accompany this map, a peer-reviewed, edited anthology was published, containing both chapters by major digital mapmakers in the continental U.S., Hawaii, Alaska, and Canada, and an Appendix with expanded research resources. The digital website is publicly accessible, and the published text may be purchased by the public. While we faced challenges of access due to the pandemic (and Oklahoma weather), we are proud of the outcome and the potential of this prototype, and the accompanying text (which included the work of several graduate students in Native American Studies and related fields, boosting their careers, publicizing the work of many digital resource creators, and leading to a grant given to an undergraduate who volunteered to assist). The digital map and text will be useful to students and scholars for years to come. In the course of the project, the Director and Mr. Tallman were able to conduct significant outreach at a number of conferences that will facilitate future expansions of the project. In addition, due to this work, the Director was invited to create a new major in Native American Studies (NAMS) at Sonoma State University and became the Acting Chair of the new NAMS Department, successfully lobbying for the hiring of a new tenure-track scholar in NAMS as part of the new program. Generations of students at our Hispanic-serving institution will benefit from this program, and the map and text will be an integral component of instruction, particularly as the tribal Nation in our region, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

5. Project Evaluation and Impact

Due to the combination of digital map and edited anthology, the MIAC-LH team feels the project was an immense success, benefitting a number of team members, sharing important information with the public, providing information for scholars, and developing a platform for future work. The Director, for example, based on work on the children’s resources tab, is planning a future book outlining state by state and tribal Nation by Nation resources for K-12 teachers. One challenge we face as a team is the future expansion of the digital map: how can we collaborate with all 574 tribal Nations in the U.S.? Collaboration with hundreds of Nations is an immense challenge, and one often faced by large educational projects and institutions. Based on what we have learned from this Level I project, we envision a future map that focuses less on story narratives and more on the inclusion of tribal websites, educational resources, and institutional locations. While we were very successful with the tribal Nations whose Chairs we knew, we were less successful expanding outward to other Nations, and we know collaboration will be key to any future expansion. The primary lessons we would like to share with future Project Directors is: (1) the suggestions of NEH staff should always be attended to closely, whether offered during the grant application process or during the time period of the grant; (2) if a grant vision has the intention of benefitting others, it can often be realized; (3) projects that deal with Native issues should always be prefaced with outreach years in advance of the grant period; and (4) projects that deal with tribal Nations should always be constructed collaboratively, and in adherence to NAGPRA and the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials. We were fortunate to already have developed relationships with several tribal Nations, as collaboration takes patience and time.
6. Project Continuation and Long-Term Impact

We believe MIAC-LH has great deal potential as a prototype for a national digital map containing educational resources. The Project Director plans to apply for a Hispanic-serving Institution award to fund the writing of a text for K-undergraduate teachers and their students outlining state by state and Nation by Nation resources related to tribal Nations. Our hope is to then come back to MIAC-LH in a Level II project with many more collaborators, and make this information an integral part of the map. As the Chair of the new Native American Studies Department at Sonoma State University, the Project Director enjoys a collegial relationship with the Chair of the Federated Nations of Graton Rancheria, and with Chairman Walter Echo-Hawk of the Pawnee Nation. The MIAC-LH team’s hope is that the vision of MIAC-LH can be expanded and extended to more Nations with the assistance of these individuals and others, and that a Level II map, while adding these additional stories, can focus on adding content from the HSI text. We envision a Level II map that a future generation of scholars can slowly build upon for the benefit of the general public and scholars, students and future teachers, so that the cultures and histories of Native Nations will continue to be shared in the educational system for years to come.