Pursuing the Potential of Digital Mapping in Latinx Studies
A White Paper for the NEH Office of Digital Humanities
on Launching the “SIGuache” Network

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Kelley Kreitz, Marissa López, Lorena Gauthereau, and Moacir P. de Sá Pereira
Executive Summary

“Pursuing the Potential of Digital Mapping in Latinx Studies” made use of a Level 1 NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant to convene a working group made up of faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and a graduate student in Latinx Studies; GIS experts; and public and academic research librarians for the purpose of advancing digital mapping in Latinx Studies and in the digital humanities. During two virtual meetings—on August 13 and October 22, 2021—and an in-person meeting at UCLA on December 2 – 4, 2021, we met to pursue the following goals:

1. Provide technical training and consultation to help participants build skills and advance their individual projects;
2. Plan a network to support current and future practitioners of digital mapping by facilitating the creation of shared data repositories, partnerships that make public libraries sites of project development and dissemination, training and mentoring opportunities, and an online hub for best practices, teaching materials, and other resources.

This white paper details our work together in achieving these goals. It also summarizes the analysis of the intersections of Latinx Studies, digital humanities, and spatial humanities—and of existing examples of academic support networks—that we conducted to inform our planning for a network we call “SIGuache.” The name SIGuache brings together a critical and destabilizing history of geographic information systems (GIS)—called “sistemas de información geográfica” in Spanish, or “SIG”—and the tradition of working-class resourcefulness emblematic of the concept of “rasquachismo” (or “rascuachismo”) from Chicana Studies. The SIGuache Network will support emerging and existing practitioners of a specifically Latinx spatial digital humanities—for the purpose of putting the past in conversation with the present in new ways, while modeling more participatory approaches to making history.
Project Origins and Goals

While digital mapping is a well-established research tool within many fields of the humanities, the ability of digital mapping to engage students and the public in creating altered views of historical spaces has yet to be fully explored. The field of Latinx Studies is built on understanding how spatial struggles shape notions of racial, ethnic, and national identity. Research within this interdisciplinary field includes investigating the earliest encounters of Indigenous communities and Spanish colonials in the territory that would belong to Spain and later an independent Mexico before the transition to U.S. rule in 1848; understanding the competing Latin American and Anglo-American efforts to gain political and cultural dominance throughout the hemisphere in the nineteenth century; and gaining insight into the formation of notions of U.S.-based Hispanic, Latina/o/x identity alongside efforts to organize for economic, social, and political equality. In recent years, Latinx Studies scholars have increasingly made use of archival materials in Spanish, English, and Indigenous languages to understand how territorial expansion and identity formation intertwined in the United States long before the words Hispanic and Latina/o/x became widely used. Digital mapping has provided scholars with opportunities to support such historical inquiry in a variety of ways, including visualizing communities represented by archival materials, making visible absences in the archival record, and engaging academics, students, and the public in contemplating history and its making.

As Latinx Studies scholars increasingly make use of digital mapping, our working group’s virtual meetings and in-person workshop provided a timely opportunity to bring together a community of faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and a graduate student in Latinx Studies; GIS experts; and public and academic research librarians who do not usually find themselves at the same scholarly gatherings. To build on the field’s longstanding investment in geographic, political, and social space, the virtual and in-person sessions pursued two main goals:

1. They supported and advanced the groundbreaking mapping work of our working group participants through a first-ever effort to build skills, share ideas, and synthesize best practices in using digital mapping as a research and pedagogical tool in Latinx Studies.
2. Workshop participants articulated a plan for amplifying each other’s work and centering Latinx Studies throughout the digital humanities.

The sessions were led by the grant team in partnership with UCLA’s Institute for Digital Research and Education, drawing on the institute’s leading expertise in GIS innovation and in approaches to digital mapping—sometimes called thick mapping or deep mapping—which combine GIS technology with critical historical inquiry.

In their 2014 book *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*, UCLA’s Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano articulated the potential of thick mapping in the digital humanities, which they defined as “processes of collecting, aggregating, and visualizing ever more layers of geographic or place-specific data” for the research and teaching of history. Such processes, they argued, represented “the possibility of telling stories, of narrating places, and of producing new configurations of knowledge in which every past, present, and future is a place. In this sense, mapping history is about curating places, conjuring and caring for ghosts.” That very possibility of recovering lost voices and reanimating the history of contested spaces has fueled the field of Latinx Studies as scholars have investigated the nineteenth-century and earlier origins of Latinx writing in the United States. Following a massive indexing effort started in the 1990s by the University of

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1 Presner et. al, *HyperCities*, 17.
2 Ibid., 15.
Houston’s Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, scholars have caught sight of what Anna Brickhouse has called a “a lost Latino public sphere … [a] forgotten Spanish-language print culture in the United States.”3 While many of the field’s foundational efforts to uncover that history have resulted from traditional research methods, Latinx Studies scholars have increasingly made use of critical digital mapping as they have sought “to reorient colonial centers and peripheries, to detach place-names from their mythic accretions, to forget the stories that we think we know.”4 Their work suggests that digital mapping as a means of understanding Latinx history and increasing participation in humanistic inquiry has yet to be fully explored. Moreover, at this time of drastic transformation in higher education, digital mapping in Latinx Studies is poised to model methods of learning and teaching that move beyond traditional one-way flows of information from scholars to students or from experts to audiences.

We determined in conversations leading up to the submission of our application in 2020 that it was an ideal time for an in-depth, rigorous dialogue among Latinx Studies scholars and other GIS experts and librarians. UCLA provided a rich academic and geographic setting for this workshop that was the first-ever meeting dedicated to realizing digital mapping’s potential for Latinx Studies and beyond. Within the field of the digital humanities, Presner’s, Shepard’s, and Kawano’s HyperCities remains the foremost articulation of the potential of digital mapping, and we were fortunate to be able to secure the participation of these scholars, who are based at UCLA, in our working group. Together we asked: What resources exist and what is needed for scholars to access and learn from best practices in researching and teaching with digital mapping? How can we share our data more effectively? How can we better publicize and share our digital mapping projects to engage students and the public more deeply in humanistic inquiry? How can we work with students and the public to imagine together political access, agency, and legitimacy?

The project built on recent related efforts within Latinx Studies and the digital humanities. Our proposal was shaped in collaboration with the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project’s U.S. Latino Digital Humanities Center (USLDH) at the University of Houston. (USLDH Digital Programs Manager, Lorena Gauthereau, participated in our working group. The project co-directors both draw on Recovery Project archives for their research, and Kelley Kreitz is a member of the organization’s board.) While the center has organized a number of events focused on digital humanities skill building, these events offer broader introductions to humanities practices. Our proposed workshop and resulting network-building was designed to extend the Recovery Project’s field building in Latinx digital humanities by bringing together a select community of innovators with the GIS experts and librarians whom they would not ordinarily meet at the conferences they attend. In addition, our working group offered a timely opportunity to build on the ideas and potentialities that have surfaced at several recent interdisciplinary conferences on digital mapping. NYU’s annual Culture Mapping conference, launched in 2017, provides a forum for sharing works in progress across a variety of disciplines. Similarly, Fordham University’s “Mapping (In)Justice: Digital Theory + Praxis for Critical Scholarship” held in November 2019 brought together those who are working on maps to advance social justice in a traditional conference format. These and other events laid the foundation for the more focused work that we were able to take up by bringing together a select group of key scholars, librarians, and GIS experts.

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3 Brickhouse, “The Black Legend of Texas,” 735.
4 Greusz, “Unsettlers and Speculators,” 744.
We also designed our working group following other successful digital models. These included NEH-funded projects, such as the Institute on Digital Archaeology, which provided hands-on training in key digital archaeological methods, and the Society for the Study of American Women Writers Recovery Hub, which is working to create a network of scholars to advance digital methods for finding archival works by women writers. Other models included the period-specific networks for supporting online scholarship: NINES and 18thConnect. We also looked at the Pelagios Network for its focus on making mapping datasets available through standard linked open data formats.

**Project Activities, Team, and Participants**

Our activities consisted of two virtual meetings—on August 13 and October 22, 2021—and one in-person meeting at UCLA from December 2 – 4, 2021. Through these meetings, we pursued our dual goals of 1) providing support to advance our working group participants’ individual projects and 2) working together to plan a network that can continue to provide support to advance the field of digital mapping in Latinx Studies.

**Meeting Schedule**

Our schedule for our meetings was as follows:

**Virtual Meeting 1 - Friday, August 13**
- “Digital Mapping Now” - Marissa López, Kelley Kreitz, Todd Presner, Yoh Kawano, Dave Shepard, Anthony Caldwell, and Wendy Kurtz
- “Enacting Pedagogic Strategies through Syllabi and Assignments” - Todd Presner and Kelley Kreitz

**Virtual Meeting 2 - Friday, October 22**
- “Library Partnerships and Collections as Data” - Andy Rutkowski and Claudia Horning
- “UX Design Session” - Lexi Quint
- “Strategies for Public Engagement” - Marissa López, Ani Boyadjian, and Monxo López

**In-person meeting at UCLA - Thursday, December 2 to Saturday, December 4**

**Thursday, December 2**
- Kick-off gathering

**Friday, December 3**
- **Session 1: Opening Discussion** - Marissa López and Kelley Kreitz
- **Session 2: Social Impact Model Workshop** - Kelley Kreitz
- **Session 3: White Paper Planning** - Marissa López and Kelley Kreitz
- **One-on-One Consultations** - Yoh Kawano, David Shepard, Anthony Caldwell, Wendy Perla Kurtz, Ashley Sanders
- **Keynote and Dinner** “Forensic Empathy: Mapping Migrant Deaths Along the US-Mexico Border” - Maite Zubiaurre

**Saturday, December 4**
- **Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps** - Marissa López
- **Digital Mapping Project Workshop - Idea Sharing and Troubleshooting** - Marissa López, Kelley Kreitz, Dave Shepard
We pre-selected our workshop facilitators, guest speakers, and nine of our working group participants during the proposal process. We selected another four participants through a call for applications completed after we received the grant. We also added three facilitators and guest speakers during the planning of our two virtual meetings and one in-person meeting at UCLA. These additions were responses to needs we learned we could meet for our working group members. For example, the addition of a session on UX Design by Lexi Quint of General Assembly LA during our October meeting followed a discussion in August that made us realize that many of our participants were grappling with user-interface design challenges in their projects.

To help manage logistics, we hired a project coordinator: recent UCLA Ph.D. and current lecturer in English at UCLA, Timothy Fosbury. His support was essential to making the project run smoothly, especially for coordinating logistics for the in-person meeting at UCLA.

The challenges we faced during the grant period resulted from the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic. We decided at the end of the Spring 2021 semester to adapt our meeting schedule (to the formats and dates shown above) from our original plan to meet for a longer in-person working session in August 2021, which was not possible because the UCLA campus was still closed to the public at that point. While it was a challenge to assess the situation and revise our plan, delaying our in-person meeting and holding two virtual meetings enabled us to increase our collaboration together as a working group. We arranged the meetings to make the virtual sessions informational, with presentations from some of our guest speakers, which left us with more time than originally planned for consultations and strategic planning during our working session at UCLA.

The rise in COVID cases by the end of the Fall 2021 semester presented another challenge for our in-person meeting in December. While we had agreed as a group earlier in the fall to meet in person, the realities of the increased risk by December meant that half of our working group members (7 out of 14 participants) were not able to travel to UCLA. Fortunately, since our presenters for the in-person event were based in LA, all were able to contribute to the schedule as planned. For those working group members who could not travel to participate in the sessions, we added a virtual option for the one-on-one consultations provided at the event. Although we determined that our planning and brainstorming required the energy of an in-person meeting, we also provided online options for sharing ideas and providing feedback before and after the event. This was not the ideal means of engaging all participants, but we did the best we could to manage a rapidly changing situation. Ultimately, we were able to carry out an event with energizing planning and brainstorming sessions that met our goals.

Project Team

Leadership Team

- López, Marissa, Co-Director  
  Professor of English and Chicana/o Studies  
  UCLA

- Kreitz, Kelley, Co-Director  
  Assistant Professor of English, Affiliate Faculty in Latinx Studies, Director of Babble Lab: A Center for Digital Humanities Pedagogy and Research  
  Pace University
Project Coordinator

- Timothy Fosbury
  Lecturer, Department of English, UCLA

Meeting Facilitators and Guest Speakers

UCLA GIS and Digital Humanities Team

- Anthony Caldwell, Assistant Director, UCLA Digital Research Consortium; Manager/Resident Technologist, UCLA Scholarly Innovation Labs (SIL), UCLA

- Yoh Kawano, Research Consultant/Scholar for Spatial Visualization, Research Technology Group for the Institute for Digital Research and Education (IDRE); Co-author of HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities, UCLA

- Wendy Perla Kurtz, Lecturer and Project Scientist, Digital Humanities Program

- Todd Presner, Ross Professor of Germanic Languages and Comparative Literature at the University of California Los Angeles; Associate Dean of Digital Innovation; Chair of the Digital Humanities Program; Co-author of HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities, UCLA

- Ashley Sanders, Vice Chair, Digital Humanities Program

- Dave Shepard, Lead Academic Developer, Humanities Technology, UCLA; Co-author of HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities

Keynote Speaker

- Maite Zubiaurre, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, Germanic Languages, UCLA

Guest Speakers and Facilitators

- Ani Boyadjian, Principal Librarian, Research & Special Collections, Los Angeles Public Library

- Claudia Horning, Director, Metadata Services, UCLA Library Cataloging and Metadata Center, UCLA

- Monxo López, Mellon Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Museum of the City of New York

- Lexi Quint, Front End/Back End Engineer, Bean.la

- Andy Rutkowski, Visualization Librarian, USC
Working Group Participants

● **Meredith Abarca**, Professor of Food Studies and Literature, Department of English, University of Texas at El Paso

● **Maira E. Álvarez**, ACLS Emerging Voices Fellow, Arizona State University

● **Nora Benedict**, Assistant Professor of Spanish and Digital Humanities, University of Georgia

● **Ayendy Bonifacio**, Assistant Professor of U.S. Ethnic Literary Studies, University of Toledo

● **Isis Campos**, Laura C. Harris Scholar-in-Residence, Denison University

● **Sylvia A. Fernández**, Public and Digital Humanities Postdoctoral Researcher with the Hall Center for the Humanities, Institute of Digital Research in the Humanities (IDRH) and The Commons, University of Kansas

● **Lorena Gauthereau**, Digital Programs Manager, US Latino Digital Humanities program, Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage, University of Houston

● **Jennifer Hinojosa**, Research Director, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, CUNY Hunter College

● **Joshua López**, Ph.D. student, University of North Texas

● **Monica Muñoz Martínez**, Associate Professor of History, University of Texas, Austin

● **Urayoán Noel**, Associate Professor of English and Spanish, Director of Graduate Studies, NYU

● **Jessica Ordaz**, Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of Colorado Boulder

● **Moacir P. de Sá Pereira**, Research Data Librarian, Columbia University

● **Bryan Winston**, Lecturer in Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies, Dartmouth College

Project Outcomes

We are pleased to have achieved our two primary goals of 1) providing support to advance our working group participants’ projects and 2) working together to develop a network to support current and future practitioners of digital mapping in Latinx Studies.

Our virtual sessions and our meeting at UCLA resulted in a vision for our network, an assessment of the state of the field, case studies of similar academic support networks, and a series of action items to pursue over the next two to three years (detailed below). Our intended audience, which has
remained the same throughout the project, includes our working group participants and other aspiring and existing practitioners of digital mapping in Latinx Studies. Our working group conversations revealed that we also want to help this audience communicate the value of Latinx digital mapping and advocate for its support at their own academic institutions.

During the grant period, we provided support to our working group participants for their individual projects, through our workshops held during the virtual sessions and through one-on-one consultations at UCLA. This individualized support, as well as our action steps for the near future (detailed in the final section of this white paper), were designed particularly to help our early-career participants publish and produce digital mapping projects that will aid them in advancing in their careers.

**Vision**

We envision a world where Latinx digital mapping serves as a leading form of research that engages students and the public in knowledge production. Institutions of higher learning and culture recognize, support, and promote scholars working in this field for their intellectual labor that includes care, relationship building, and social and political impact. Students have opportunities to participate in this work, based on their level of training and on a clear understanding within the field and at our academic institutions of appropriate learning opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Universities invest in research and curriculum initiatives that empower future changemakers and direct resources toward their communities.

**State of the Field: The Case for SIGuache**

*From Latinx Digital Mapping to SIGuache*

Latinx digital mapping engages scholars, students, and the public in creating altered views of historical and present-day spaces. Digital mapping is a means of understanding Latinx history and increasing participation in humanistic inquiry. Moreover, at this time of drastic transformation in higher education, digital mapping in Latinx Studies is poised to model methods of learning and teaching that move beyond traditional one-way flows of information from scholars to students or from experts to audiences. To emphasize these goals and our intervention in relevant fields, our group coined the term “SIGuache,” described in detail below.

In coining the term “SIGuache,” we refer to not only the tradition of working-class resourcefulness emblematic of “rasquachismo” (or “rascuachismo”), but also to a critical and destabilizing history of geographic information systems (GIS)—“sistemas de información geográfica” in Spanish, hence “SIG”—and to the way the hermeneutics of suspicion has created the necessary epistemology in the humanities to critically view the technological and methodological advances under the umbrella of “digital humanities” (DH). Our goal is to create a resourceful hybrid that indicates the means by which a specifically Latinx spatial digital humanities can provide guides for aspiring spatial digital humanists in Latinx Studies as well as suggest points of intervention in spatial digital humanities as a whole.

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5 For a brief introduction to rasquachismo, see Gutiérrez, “Rasquachismo” and below. See also below for more about the history of GIS. For the hermeneutics of suspicion and critique, see Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading”; Felski, *The Limits of Critique*. 

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The Critical Case for GIS

Though computational and digital mapping—what we may now broadly call GIS—emerged slowly over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, it was only in the 1980s that the practices began to attract often critical attention from other geographers. As Nadine Schuurman notes, the initial salvos in “the GIS wars” were precisely the sorts of polemics of two camps at strong epistemological odds with each other. During the 1990s, “critical GIS” began to take shape, heeding Schuurman’s insight that for a critique of GIS to serve as an intervention into the broader field of GIScience or GIS practitioners, it is better for it to be “motivated by a genuine desire to create a better GIS,” so that “dropping in from a foreign discursive territory to pass judgment on GIS is replaced, in this genre, by commitment to understanding the imbrications of the social and the algorithmic.”

Over the course of the opening decades of the twenty-first century, several GISes sharing a critical stance have subsequently emerged. In 2014, thirty geographers gathered at Friday Harbor to revisit the previous thirty years of critical GIS and found a dense field providing “for a constant dialectical process of critique and renewal.” As the field has grown, critical GIS has also provided a comfortable base for the emerging field of “critical data studies.” Of particular interest to SIGuache is the consolidation of these various GISes with a broader view towards “the digital” in “digital geographies.” Keeping a focus on the digital “allows for ‘the digital’ to function as a site and mode for intersectional research that cuts across research foci and leverages methodologies from multiple geographical sub-disciplines, intellectual traditions, and epistemological communities.”

The Critical Case for DH

The growth of computational practices in the humanities resembles, though perhaps offset by a generation, the growth in geography. As a result, it is not surprising that some of the epistemological and critical debates over the nature of digital humanities sound so familiar that DH scholars are encouraged to revisit the “GIS Wars” and the earlier “Paradigm Wars” for guidance. The multi-volume series Debates in Digital Humanities itself stands as a testament to the various forms and critical twists DH has taken over the past decade or so. As Jamie “Skye” Bianco notes in an essay from the first volume of Debates in DH, “digital and computational practitioners must move away from the practices and logic of unifying standards and instrumentality,” with the goal of keeping in mind how “radically heterogeneous and multimodally layered” the digital is.

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6 Schuurman, “Trouble in the Heartland.”
7 Schuurman, 99.
8 See, for example, “Feminist GIS” in Kwan, “Feminist Visualization”; Kwan, “Introduction.” For “Qualitative GIS,” see Cope and Elwood, Qualitative GIS. For “Participatory GIS,” see Elwood, “Critical Issues in Participatory GIS.”
9 Thatcher et al., “Revisiting Critical GIS,” 3. The authors provide a bibliography of the history of critical GIS. For a more recent history, see, Wilson, New Lines. Meeting at Friday Harbor is symbolic in that it was through meetings there in the early 1990s that “GIS and Society,” the ancestor of critical GIS, took shape.
10 Kitchin and Lauriault, “Towards Critical Data Studies.”
12 Sá Pereira, “Mixed Methodological Digital Humanities.”
13 Just as there are other GISes, there are other DHs. See, for example, Baeza Ventura et al., “A US Latinx Digital Humanities Manifesto”; Gallon, “Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities”; Noble, “Toward a Critical Black Digital Humanities”; Ruberg, Boyd, and Howe, “Toward a Queer Digital Humanities”; Svensson, Big Digital Humanities.
As DH has settled over the course of this century, the wisdom of Schuurman’s insight has been validated many times over: the strength of DH as a critical practice comes from its practitioners’ critical relationship with their own methods and theories. On the other hand, uses of new terms for computational literary study, such as “cultural analytics,” suggest “businesslike or information-science processing” that remains distant “from the modes of interpretation and advocacy of many DH projects that align with cultural studies.” Opportunities clearly still exist for a richer investigation into how digital humanists, eclectic as they may be, understand their objects of study.  

**Spatial Humanities, DH GIS, and/or GeoHumanities**

The geographers who met at Friday Harbor three decades later to reflect on the GIS Wars demonstrate a particular optimism regarding critical GIS and digital humanities. For them, the “digital humanities have grappled directly with the contradictions between interpretative approaches to scholarship that characterize many humanistic ways of knowing, and analytical computing paradigms largely designed by engineers to serve the interests of capital accumulation and state power.” While geographers have constructed an apparatus of methodological and critical introspection, they welcome new insights from beyond their field. Importantly, the interdisciplinary opportunities move in both directions, as “critical geographical perspectives on absolute and relative spaces as well as on cartography have much to offer” the digital humanities.

More recently, Jen Jack Giesking has delineated five points of intervention where digital humanists can “contribute to the growth and development of GIS and, in so doing, the growth of spatial thinking in and beyond the humanities.” The list is notable for the inclusion of honing a “DH-specific spatiotechnological imagination” based on an expanded use of GIS software. Better control of the various tools helps meet the fifth point of intervention, the use of DH GIS for public humanities in the interest of social justice.

From the opposite side, digital humanists have taken up the invitation, spreading into what Patricia Murrieta-Flores and Bruno Martins see as the different fields of “geoHumanities” and “spatial humanities.” The former exposes GIScience methodologies to humanistic objects of study, with “research being carried out that includes visualisation methods for textual corpora and cultural heritage… gaming technologies… but also linguistic approaches and methods such as Geographical Text Analysis… which make use not only of GIS, but also of theories and methods from Corpus Linguistics and Natural Language Processing to analyse and study geographies mentioned in texts.” In contrast, the spatial humanities consider “the relevant concern that not all places and spaces are geographical,” highlighting how work in the humanities deals “with symbolic, vague and imaginary space, but also with conceptions that can be different to those of the West or Modernity.”

**The Intervention of Latinx Studies**

The NEH workshop “Pursuing the Potential of Digital Mapping in Latinx Studies” sought to bring together Latinx scholars and GIS practitioners to explore the intervention Latinx Studies can make in spatial humanities. By its very nature, Latinx Studies is interdisciplinary, multilingual, and

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17 Gieseking, “Where Are We?”
18 Gieseking, 643.
oftentimes transnational. Latinx scholars must negotiate the intersection of various Latin American national canons, spaces, history, and culture with those of the United States and the resulting hybrid Latinx cultures that have emerged. As a result, research in the field juxtaposes the plurality of nation of origin with common experiences such as immigration, language, religion, shared customs, coloniality, and discrimination. Moreover, “[d]espite linguistic, ethnic, national, and cultural differences, US Latinxs are survivors and negotiators of multiple colonialisms and neocolonialisms (Indigenous, Spanish, Portuguese, British, US), with their enduring legacies of racism and discrimination.”

A survey of Latinx anthologies further demonstrates the impact of these “multiple colonialisms and neocolonialisms” on our understanding of Latinidad, through the inclusion of Spanish colonial writings. As Nicolás Kanellos and Helvetia Martell argue, the legacy of Latinx cultural production can be traced back to writings by Spanish colonial explorers such as Juan Ponce de León (1513) and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1542), as well as to the introduction of the printing press into New Spain in 1533. Thus, while the field of Latinx studies began to achieve official recognition in academia during the civil rights movements of the 1960s, cultural production was not new. To critically analyze these multiple dimensions of Latinx cultural production, scholars have employed a range of theories and methods, including border theory, postcolonial theory, decolonial theory, intersectional feminism, translation methods, semiotics, deconstruction, cultural criticism, critical race theory, poststructural theory, and historical materialism, among others.

**Latinx DH and Mapping**

Latinx DH, in turn, extends from this rich field in order to further humanistic inquiry through the application of digital tools. Researchers use digital software in Latinx Studies to analyze corpora, make archival resources available, develop network analyses, create interactive visualizations and digital maps, and produce other digital scholarship. In “A US Latinx Digital Humanities Manifesto,” the authors describe Latinx DH as scholarship that is grounded in research that centers “Latinx lives, community, intellectual production, scholarship, and archival collections” and attends “to the politics of erasure that structures inquiry within institutionalized fields of study, including the erasure of Blackness, Indigeneity, and gender in historical imaginaries in the Americas.” Thus, for Latinx scholars, DH offers a way to interrogate coloniality, discrimination, gender and sexuality, activism, religion, language, immigration, genre, etc., and makes this research more accessible both within and outside of academia, engaging a broader audience.

Latinx digital mapping, in particular, considers how cartographic representations can disrupt hegemonic national discourses. It does so by engaging the same theories and methods that center marginalized voices (people, stories, archives, events). Mapping projects thus have the potential to increase the visibility of Latinx communities and cultural production, situating them in a physical space, but also demonstrating network connections between space and time. Using approaches such as border, decolonial, and postcolonial theories, digital mapping also challenges the cartographic ideal itself, questioning political borders, shifting national boundaries, and colonial territories.

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21 Smith and Franco, 10.
25 Edney, *Cartography.*
Latinx Studies brings to the fore the ways that Latinidad is not static, but dynamic, as people migrate across territories, carrying with them their language, culture, stories, archives, and labor.

**Mapping from Below with SIGuache**

We see “SIGuache” as a way to conceptualize the methods and theories applied in Latinx digital mapping. “SIGuache” calls attention to the bilingual nature of this subfield. By privileging the Spanish, we seek to decenter English as default in technology and digital scholarship. Drawing on rasquachismo from Chicana Studies, SIGuache considers the social components of Latinx mapping—both the precarity and ingenuity of its practitioners. Due to this precarity, Latinx digital practitioners have drawn on rasquachismo, a “direct relationship with the material level of existence” and an “attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability.”

This approach pushes the imagination of not only how a project can be constructed, but also how the project can help educate Latinx communities and represent geospatial scholarship in ways that resist hegemonic narratives. Marisa Hicks-Alcaraz describes the employment of digital rasquachismo as:

> a sociopolitical praxis in response to scarce resources that retools technology based in everyday lived experiences to create greater equity. Digital rasquachismo appropriates an attitude of “making do” as a means of finding creative solutions by using whatever tools are available to minimize barriers and maximizes access. Application of the term, however, is not rooted solely in economic necessity. Digital rasquachismo is driven by both a socio-economic imperative and a deliberate choice to imagine new uses of digital technologies to dismantle hegemonic paradigms that disproportionately subject BIPPOC groups to generational inequities.

As many DH practitioners have noted, the digital humanities are overwhelmingly white and have typically ignored cultural criticism and ethnic studies. Unlike projects that continue to emphasize and preserve Western European and Anglocentric narratives, Latinx digital humanities:

> remains, as a whole, underfunded, underrecognized, non-tenured, at-risk, precarious, and pushed to conform to extractive practices of knowledge production that do not benefit the communities with which we are allied. Funding remains unbalanced with regard to Latinx representation, with large-scale projects linked to powerful institutions receiving the lion’s share of foundation support. Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) often do not acknowledge the experience and cultural knowledge of Latinx scholars, resulting in nonexistent, or at best, limited, institutional buy-in to support faculty and staff lines, graduate student research fellowships, projects, and community collaborations.

SIGuache, thus, creates a decolonial world view—working from below, it nevertheless superimposes Latinx narratives over spaces traditionally understood through a colonial gaze. It reminds users that Latinx communities exist in space and throughout time, forming a necessary and tangible part of the cultural fabric of the country. This scholarship cognitively reorients positionality, the margin, the

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27 Hicks-Alcaraz, “ImaginX En Movimiento (IXeM),” 3.
29 Baeza Ventura et al., “A US Latinx Digital Humanities Manifesto.”
center, and the narrative by displacing and contesting political boundaries. Latinx methodological approaches elucidate the ways that spatial humanities reckon with, as mentioned above, “symbolic, vague and imaginary space” through lenses that challenge Eurocentrism, coloniality, and modernity.  

**Case Studies**

Building on our clarified purpose as a group, we considered a range of extant projects to determine our needs and opportunities for growth going forward. Because the spirit of SIGuache is to visualize space in order to mobilize with limited resources, we think it crucial for our network to be flexible, distributed, and lightweight. To be a lean, mean, mapping machine, to be an engine of socially just knowledge, we aim to empower our communities by leveraging existing infrastructure while avoiding duplication. We do not wish to reinvent any wheels, especially if those wheels were not designed with the humanities in mind.

Below, we discuss our understanding of our network’s potential, powered by the principle of SIGuache, in relation to the following case studies.

**Post 45** ([post45.org/](https://post45.org/))

- **Activities:** Post45 is a collective of scholars working on American literature and culture since 1945. They host a print and online journal as well as a book series at Stanford UP. They curate online conversations, host an annual conference, and host peer-reviewed, Post45 data sets including HathiTrust Fiction. Each peer-reviewed dataset has an accompanying curatorial statement, which provides an overview of the data that explains its contents, construction, and some possible uses. Their scholarly products, events, and online presence are a model for curating institutional gravitas and creating a center of gravity that can attract and support emerging scholars.

- **Funding:** Supported through membership fees, conference attendance, and journal subscriptions.

- **Relevance for SIGuache:** We admire the scholarly community Post45 has produced and aim to replicate the self-referential citational practices they deploy in order to support network members’ scholarship, but we do not wish to replicate their resource-heavy data hosting. Rather than create an analogous repository, we’ll promote the use of open source repositories like Dryad ([https://datadryad.org/stash/](https://datadryad.org/stash/)). Likewise, we are not interested in publishing books, but might consider an online forum and web presence akin to Post45’s.

**Institute on Digital Archaeology Method and Practice** ([http://digitalarchaeology.msu.edu/](http://digitalarchaeology.msu.edu/))

- **Activities:** Provided hands-on training in key digital archaeological methods and developed a commons site ([http://commons.digitalarchaeology.msu.edu/](http://commons.digitalarchaeology.msu.edu/)).

- **Funding:** Training meeting was funded by an NEH ODH Institute for Advanced Topics in DH grant; used CUNY Grad Center’s Commons in a Box ([https://commonsinabox.org/](https://commonsinabox.org/)) to build the Commons Platform.

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• **Relevance for SIGuache:** Their “commons” is now defunct and appears to have been hacked by bots. The lesson here, repeated across several similar projects, is that dedicated platforms and technologies are difficult, and perhaps not necessary, to maintain. They require a lot of money and people power, and they might not produce the desired effect. SIGuache is about leveraging extant resources to catalyze institutional and intellectual movement, whereas sites, tools, and platforms tend to become ossified and ineffective over time.


• **Activities:** Works to create a network of scholars to advance digital methods for finding archival works by women writers. Offers resources, consultation, cultivation, and peer review.

• **Funding:** Initial funding came from an NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant, Level 1; they now have membership fees ($30 for grad students; $200 for faculty; $400/$750 for institutions, depending on the number of members from the institution).

• **Relevance for SIGuache:** There is a lot to borrow from here. The site is active and does many of the things we aim to do: showcase work, leverage a network, and offer technical support.

*NINES* (Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship) ([https://nines.org/](https://nines.org/))

• **Activities:** Peer review and publishing of nineteenth-century digital scholarship; workshops; resource clearinghouse; they also bring together digitized material and host a collaborative, virtual “classroom” space that appears underused.

• **Funding:** Appears to have been supported by UVA initially; currently they charge membership fees.

• **Relevance for SIGuache:** While the NINES platform seems useful, it’s not clear how much people use it, illuminating another trend across platforms: some projects get a lot of funding and buzz early on, then fizzle out as technology moves on and it becomes difficult to maintain momentum or user interest. Under “Recent News” on their site, for example, are updates from last year, and their “Community” page indicates the most recent activity is from 2017. We do appreciate and desire to emulate two aspects of NINES: their resource gathering and their peer reviewing. We think we can do the former, however, without reinventing any wheels: resources can be linked to on a website. Peer reviewing is useful, but with the advent of sites like *Reviews in Digital Humanities* ([https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/](https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/)), perhaps no longer needed.

*18thConnect* ([https://18thconnect.org/](https://18thconnect.org/))

• **Activities:** Peer review and publishing of eighteenth-century digital scholarship; workshops; resource clearinghouse.

• **Funding:** 18thConnect is supported by Texas A&M and Auburn.

• **Relevance for SIGuache:** Like NINES, with which it is affiliated, 18thConnect is a cool but underused platform, with “most recent” exhibits from 2017. While it purports to facilitate open access, moreover, with its aggregator, users still need institutional access to the databases it pulls from for the platform to work. Like NINES, 18thConnect serves as a peer review resource offering users tenure and promotion letters, but as we note above this is perhaps no longer necessary. It might make more of a lasting impact for our network to promote our members to the review boards of platforms like *Reviews in Digital Humanities* than to invent our own platform.
**Pelagios Network** ([https://pelagios.org/](https://pelagios.org/))

- **Activities:** An open access platform designed to connect digital humanists interested in mapping. They coordinate several different activities, as described on their website:
  - **Annotation,** which supports the use of semantic annotation to link and explore historical place information;
  - **Collaboration,** which provides a forum for all Project Partners to share resources and collaborate;
  - **Gazetteers,** which establishes core requirements for global authority files on historic places and their alignment;
  - **Pedagogy,** which supports the use of linked data in education and cultural heritage;
  - **Registry,** which establishes services for registering and discovering linked data collections for places;
  - **Visualization** which develops methods and tools which make use of semantic annotation.31

- **Funding:** Pelagios is free and volunteer driven.

- **Relevance for SIGuache:** Pelagios is a phenomenal resource that we would promote but not attempt to replicate. They are Classics driven, but could be useful collaborators. Their Recogito tool has amazing potential for our group.

**Digital Ethnic Futures Consortium** ([http://digitalethnicfutures.org](http://digitalethnicfutures.org))

- **Activities:** DEFcon, as they refer to themselves, is a national consortium of digital ethnic studies practitioners. Their mission is to bring ethnic studies into closer dialog with the digital humanities, and they focus especially on non-research intensive schools where digital ethnic studies practitioners have less access to resources. As described on their website, DEFcon is committed to:
  - Developing an organizational structure to coordinate the national and cross-institutional work necessary to provide mentorship on developing digital ethnic studies curriculum for regional public universities that are Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs);
  - Promoting collaboration, knowledge mobilization, and exchange at the nexus of digital humanities and ethnic studies fields;
  - Sharing strategies for successful implementation of curricular initiatives through a speaker series, networking opportunities, and a virtual annual meeting;
  - Providing financial support to three regional public universities (New Jersey City University, Texas Southern University, and California State University, Fullerton) to scale their digital ethnic studies curriculum and projects and to position them to be regional nodes of DEFCon; and
  - Expanding capacity beyond the four founding partner institutions by offering regranted funds and mentorship for course and curriculum development to faculty and librarians at regional public universities.32

- **Funding:** Funded by a $3,000,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for 2021-2024.


• **Relevance for SIGuache:** We should be allies and collaborators with DEFCon, but we cannot replicate their work. We should participate in their activities to the extent we’re able.

**Project Evaluation and Impact**

Our workshop, extended by pandemic necessity over several months, resulted in the formation of SIGuache, a network of digital mappers invested in Latinx communities and scholarship and committed to democratizing the tools, resources, and knowledge necessary to visualizing space. We can evaluate our network by the progress individual members have made in their work (one of our members, Monica Muñoz Martinez, won a MacArthur Fellowship in 2021), their active presence on our Discord server, and continued participation in our monthly, virtual “Happy Data Hour,” where we share challenges and solutions. This NEH grant catalyzed the formation of a necessary scholarly network.

We are happy to have assembled a diverse group of scholars and practitioners through direct invitations and targeted outreach. SIGuache comprises scholars and staff at every rank and institution type, each of whom has something to offer the group, room to develop, and the support to catalyze change.

Our group cohered so well and continues to interact because we took seriously the task of reflection and assessment. As we developed the project for the proposal, we sent a survey to our participants to assess the areas of greatest need. Those areas emerged as: technical support for digital mapping research projects, help with establishing library partnerships, and examples of using digital mapping in the classroom.

To evaluate our progress during and after our meetings, we sent a survey to participants after our 8/13 virtual meeting and after our 12/3 meeting at UCLA, and held a virtual conversation on 3/28.

From the 8/13 survey, we learned that participants found especially helpful learning from sharing examples and challenges with each other. Following our 8/13 survey, we built in more time for discussion in the 10/22 session.

From the 12/3 survey, we learned that participants were especially interested in working sessions to develop their own projects. There is a great need within the field of Latinx Studies for help with building datasets—from advice on metadata, to storage options, to the best practices and timing for making datasets publicly available.

A number of useful lessons for future project directors emerged over the course of the project, including the following.

• Working group participants were especially interested in their own projects and networking freely with each other.
• Our hybrid approach, created out of necessity because of the pandemic, ended up providing a productive way to work together. Our virtual sessions gave us a shared language that enabled us to jump into the planning in our December session. Spreading our interaction out, moreover, in short bursts over several months, enabled stronger bonds to form between participants.
Our research into models for academic networks also revealed the need for nimble structures, as resource-intensive sites are difficult to maintain over time. Our focus through SIGuache is about leveraging extant resources, such as Dryad and Github, to catalyze institutional and intellectual movement. (Details below.)

**Project Continuation and Long-Term Impact**

Our project will continue with four main initiatives over the next two to three years, during which time we will continue planning and consider applying for additional funding.

- **SIGuache Discord Group** - This provides a forum for regular updates about training opportunities, new research, conferences and lectures, and questions and ideas that enables our working group to stay in touch.

- **Quarterly “Happy Data Hours”** - Kelley Kreitz and Marissa López
  One of our take-aways from our conversations together was that many of our participants find it helpful to compare notes on the progress they are making on their projects and the questions and challenges they are facing. We will hold a quarterly forum on Zoom to help meet this need.

- **Special issues on SIGuache** - Marissa López and Sylvia Fernández
  We plan to target *DH Quarterly* and *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* to publish special issues focused on SIGuache. We believe this will help to expand our reach and support our junior scholars in publishing their work.

- **Website at SIGuache.org** - Kelley Kreitz and Moacir P. de Sá Pereira
  This site will serve a discovery layer pointing visitors to datasets housed on Github, a Zotero group, and to a repository for syllabi and assignments on Humanities Commons.
Bibliography


