Preserving Black Settlements through Grassroots Archives & Cemeteries

Schuyler Carter, Jennifer Blanks

This paper is about the inadequate curation of African American sense of place, especially black settlements, towns, and sacred lands. Formerly enslaved persons and descendants established black settlements, towns and communities such as Texas Freedom Colonies (TFCs). At one time, as many as 557+ settlements existed in Texas alone. Currently, there is an inability to find many of them on maps or in current census records, but they live on through memory, church anniversaries, oral histories, and family reunions. These areas represent an especially unique narrative of strength, survival, and the ability to prosper in the midst of extreme adversity as they were established by former slaves in their respective states during 1866-1920. The diminishing state of these communities is what makes this project necessary. Not only are these areas experiencing population loss, but the oral histories of these areas are being neglected due to the lack of consideration from conventional archival operations. Access, vulnerability and visibility are within the triad of problems that these communities face. These geographies often lack the access to resources such as water, electricity, flood recovery, etc. These communities are often in areas prone to experiencing damage from natural disasters as well as manmade hazards such as contaminated water sources full of toxins. Cemeteries are often the last remaining cultural landscape to aid in the visibility of the place. Incorporating these settlements into museum curation, the heritage collected from grassroots archives informs public history and public history informs our thinking about place and rights to place.

The overarching goal of this presentation is to explain how empirical study and methodologies informing the Texas Freedom Colonies Project (specifically its Atlas, a digital humanities platform) can be adapted within contexts outside Texas--Louisiana and Oklahoma. The research purpose is to discover new planning strategies that bridge applied heritage conservation assessment and planning, cultural reproduction, and participatory planning.

The Texas Freedom Colonies Project Atlas and Study is a digital humanities platform and survey which crowdsources, maps, and aggregates freedom colony place, heritage, and social geographic data. For this presentation, Texas Freedom Colonies Project team members, Schuyler Carter and Jennifer Blanks, will explain the ways that the Project’s underlying research purpose and methodology have informed their own research into preservation and disaster preparedness and assessment of places of significance to African American heritage and culture. More specifically, each is interested in two spaces which play vital roles in understanding the African American sense of place. More specifically, each examines these spaces--the archives and cemeteries--as places urban planning needs to integrate more directly into research on African American resilience, disaster recovery, gentrification, historic preservation planning, and community building. Carter will explain the role of personal archives and ephemera in understanding varied constructions of black identity and sense of place. She explains the way the Texas freedom colonies project Atlas’ approach to curation has shaped her own approach to leveraging new media to collect, secure and analyze afro-indigeneity and community building history. Her goal is to identify which social constructs within African American personal archives provide insights into black community building within historically black settlements in Texas and Oklahoma. African American settlements’ organizational culture will be explored through the context of personal and community archives. Blanks focuses on cemetery preservation, especially disaster planning and assessment in Texas Freedom Colonies and Louisiana. She explains the unique threats (many posed by planners and
Video Production

developers) to African American cemeteries. Blanks and Carter explain the multi-hazards that cemeteries and archives encounter that threaten African American places and how integral conservation is to addressing these threats.
"SURGE" Health & Hospital Facilities: Case Studies
Professor George J. Mann, Architect, AIA

Our country has suffered a tremendous unprecedented shock that has rocked the very foundations of our society. Plain and simple, we have been attacked by a virulent deadly disease.

It has been a medical Pearl Harbor or World Trade Center tragedy, both of which are dwarfed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. How can we defend ourselves against the unexpected? What have we learned, and how do we recover? What do we need to do? What can we do? Note how our society had to change and adapt, after the Pearl Harbor and World Trade Center attacks. This pandemic likely will move up to first place in its traumatic impact on our society. Certainly the mortality rate has mushroomed, as well as having a very negative impact on our economy. It caught us all off guard, and was totally unexpected.

We need an integrated interdisciplinary approach to be properly prepared for all possible and imaginable natural disasters, tornados, tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons, floods, fires, pandemics, as well as for all possible shocks both biological and manmade accidents, radioactive accidents, military attacks, bio terrorism warfare, and any other conceivable threats.

Alternative System of Health and Hospital Facilities to accommodate patient "SURGES."

We need an alternative system of health and hospital facilities that can handle the sudden “SURGE” of patients in disasters, epidemics or other unforeseen events. Such “SURGE” Health and Hospital Facilities need to be organized in every community in the USA. Examples of existing buildings that could quickly become “SURGE” Health and Hospital Facilities, are hotels, motels, high school gymnasiums, warehouses, churches, convention centers, and other appropriate buildings. However buildings alone, cannot save lives or heal. They need to have qualified medical, nursing and allied health staff prepared with beds, blankets, linen, food, water, medicine and medical supplies, caps, masks, gowns, ventilators, emergency power, and security.

Ventilation and Air Exchanges

One of the most important areas to focus on in both existing health facilities and proposed SURGE Health & Hospital Facilities relates to fresh air circulation and exchanges so that the virus is not spread throughout a health facility thus contaminating it. Experienced mechanical engineers, who understand healthy air flow are vital to the success of the team. Technology Needs to be Utilized More Widely. The experience of not having enough ventilators on hand is a case in point.

Telemedicine

Another example is the importance of telemedicine in patient care, whether in a densely populated area or in a remote area. Mass testing for the COVID-19 must happen quickly, and new technology can make that happen. Perhaps mobile phones or wrist watches could be developed to detect when one is near a person who is infected.

Conclusion

What we propose needs to happen – as quickly as possible – as we are woefully unprepared for future pandemics and disasters, or even the likely resurgence of COVID19. As we have spent billions of dollars
on developing defense systems to prevent future Pearl Harbor and World Trade Center events, we need to rethink the defense and health of our people, in the context of new threats, and invest accordingly.

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Although the benefits of a digital twin city have been made based on real-time data collected from pre-installed Internet of Things (IoT) sensors (e.g., traffics, energy use, air pollution, water quality, noise pollution, etc.) for monitoring and managing complex systems of cities, but the sensor-based reality information is likely insufficient to provide dynamic spatiotemporal information of physical vulnerability in cities. Understanding current states of physical vulnerability in cities can support city decision-makers to analyze associated potential risk in urban areas for both disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation in extreme weather events. As a step toward creating a digital twin city for effective risk-informed decision-makings, this research proposes a new framework to bring crowdsourced visual data-based reality information into a 3D virtual city for model update with interactive and immersive visualization. Unstructured visual data are collected from participatory sensing and analyzed to estimate the geospatial information of vulnerable objects in the distance representing physical vulnerability in cities. The crowdsourced visual data-based reality information of physical vulnerability in a given region is then integrated with a 3D virtual city model. Compared to 3D virtual city models relying on sensor data from pre-installed city monitoring devices, the proposed method enables to bring an additional context dimension for generating digital replica of a city informed by real-time spatiotemporal information of physical vulnerability from participatory sensing. To test the proposed framework, case studies were conducted on Houston, TX, and whole process and results are shown in a video. The outcomes demonstrate that the proposed method has the potential to leverage unstructured visual data to estimate the geospatial location of physical vulnerability that may have negative impact on neighboring critical infrastructure. The updated 3D virtual city model based on participatory sensing is expected to contribute to risk-informed decision-makings in cities, which helps analyze various what-if scenarios in disaster situations with the increased visibility into hazard and city interactions.

KEYWORDS: Participatory Sensing; Digital Twin City; Geospatial Localization
Out of Breath

Eman Al-Zubeidi

Out of Breath highlights the heartbreaking events that unfolded during the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019. The final series depicts a time lapse of larger-than-life photographs of a translucent fabric. Each photograph in the series reflects the increasing number of victims whose lives were taken away. The victims are represented by bullet holes that progressively puncture the fabric over time. The cloth serves as a metaphor for the constricting and suffocating grief of losing a loved one at the hands of merciless bigotry. The viewer is placed in the shoes of someone who’s behind or underneath the cloth to emphasize the notion that this can happen to anyone at any time, especially those who are marginalized. My video features details of the production process, including the use of gunpowder, a simple generative coin toss trick, and careful manipulation of the fabric to capture fifty-one bullet holes that mirror the total number of deaths caused by the devastating events.
The Cut
Weiling He

The Cut exemplifies the structure of fragmented rhythms across various mediums. Inspired by John Hejduk's architectural work Wall Houses and his poem France Is Far, the project intends to foreground the sentiment of discontinuity, interruption, and fragmentation by creating spatial conditions that immediately challenge the viewer’s body.

The architecture of The Cut is composed of seventy-five pieces of steel panels finished in rough black paint. The panels are hung vertically from a steel structure that a passage space of one person's width. However, pieces of glass cover the bottom of the structure underscore the impossibility of moving through the work. Rectangular holes are cut on the steel panels. The positions and dimensions of the holes register the rhythm in Hejduk's poem France Is Far. The steel panels are turned in 45 degrees from the direction of the passage so that the space between the panels and the frame is completely open in one direction while completely close in the other. Six steel frames interrupt the passage; their individual placements are also derived from the rhythm of Hejduk’s poem.

The Cut is about intervals – the space in between media, time, and discursiveness and non-discursiveness of languages. The paintings, the poem, the architecture, the installation, the music, and the video are all exemplifications of cuts. They form an evolution across and based on intervals. The proposed book chapter will address these intervals through analysis of both the work and the design process, aiming at an autopsy of layers, weaves, and merges that deal with intuitive and the analytical experiences.