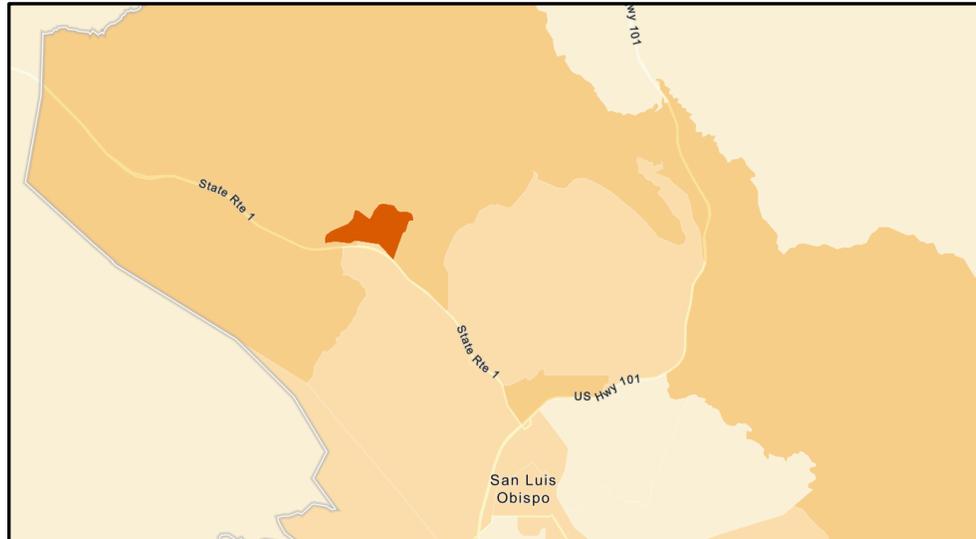




“Mapping Race in Your Hometown”



What

An organically evolved assignment at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo involving the collaboration of a History faculty member, the College of Liberal Arts Librarian, Kennedy Library’s Data and GIS Specialist, library student assistants, and hundreds of students in multiple sections of the History 206 class.

The assignment invites students to explore demographics of where they grew up, thus personalizing what might seem like a very abstract concept. Using one very simple online visualization tool, *Racial Dot Map*, they can see population distribution from the last census. Using a more complex subscribed database, *Social Explorer*, they create a second, dynamic map that shows racial change between 1960 and the present for where they grew up. They are asked to reflect on what they observe, and calibrate it with their experience.

Birth of the Assignment

The assignment grew out of a presentation of personal experience in the 1960s by the CLA librarian, who grew up in a racially bifurcated neighborhood in Seattle. During the second iteration of the presentation it struck the librarian how some geographical features played into that bifurcation, and, working with the Data and GIS specialist, teamed up to frame the presentation in geographical terms and as a way to introduce mapping tools to the 100+ students in each section of this class. Presenter feedback forms showed that students both wanted to learn more about racial demographics and how to use such interesting mapping tools. Working with the history professor to develop it, and testing several versions of instructions on the library student assistants, the assignment has become a regular feature of that course. An open presentation of the assignment last spring was attended by faculty from several departments.



Why it is Valuable

This assignment accomplishes several goals at once: it engages students with critical thinking about race and their own experience; it engages students from all disciplines with digital tools in a lightweight and effective way; it lets students know that the library is willing and able to support their own research via consultation. The assignment is also a model for effective library and instructional faculty collaboration.

What Students Have to Say

“San Luis Obispo is known for being a very white town so it does not surprise me that the map is showing this as well. Throughout the town it is pretty evenly distributed of other races like Asian and there isn't any significant clumping's of any race. It is interesting how there is no visible Black dots on the map, except for where the California Men's Colony is. This doesn't change the way I think about the town but more about the proportion of blacks in prison which is a whole other issue itself. This shows how high the percentage of minorities in prison is compared to whites and when you look at the map of the entire US you can see white is the most prominent race, so theoretically prisons should have a significant white population in it, but this is not the case.”

“Racial Dot of Gilroy, Ca This illustrates the large population of hispanics living in central and the outskirts of Gilroy. Growing up, there was about 60% hispanic and about 25% white and the other 15% was asian or other. I was aware of this growing up but what struck me was the concentration of the white and asian population. The blue dots shown (white individuals) are all concentrated in an area where the property value is high. The population of hispanics are mostly in the downtown area where most of the housing is cheaper and affordable for the middle class.

I wonder how the white population after the 1960's, felt about the large percentage of hispanics moving into Gilroy, being that there was a large white population during the 1960's. There must have been a large accommodation to the different population moving in, did much of the population leave or did they get pushed to areas where property value are high? While working on part 2 of the assignment, I started to wonder how the creators were able to get the data and the percentages from so many towns and states from the time span of so many decades.”

“This assignment was useful for exploring the topic of race through digital tools and visualization because it allowed us to truly see the distribution of race in America throughout time. This is much more interesting and telling of the story of America because we can choose any place to research about and how it has changed over time.”

“The assignment was very useful at aiding the exploration of race. The database was easy to maneuver, and it was intriguing to visualize my hometown based off the different racial groups. It made me want to explore other towns out of curiosity.”

To view the assignment, visit the *Mapping Race* option on the bottom left of the History Research Guide at: <http://guides.lib.calpoly.edu/history>