

# History 2284 (seminar) Digital History from 101 to 3.0

Harvard University, Fall 2013  
Tuesdays, 1-3pm  
CGIS Knafel 108

Prof. Kelly O'Neill  
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Office hours: Tues 3-5pm, Wed 11am-12pm  
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Virtual Spaces:

[Main course site](#)

[WordPress blog](#)

## Course Description

What does it mean to practice history in the digital age? How is the ‘digital turn’ shaping the way we conceptualize the past, design and conduct historical research, and communicate our findings to audiences old and new?

This seminar will explore the expanding landscape of digital history from the perspectives of both theory and practice. We will examine major debates in the field and seek answers to some of the many provocative questions posed in the emerging literature. Digital history seems well-equipped to provide new forms of access to sources, for example, but how does the process of digitization – the transformation of a document from a tangible into a digital object – change the way in which we interrogate and contextualize historical material? Does the democratization of access to archives, together with the proliferation of the blogosphere, threaten the relevance of the historical profession? What does digital history offer in terms of innovative and substantive new ways of understanding the past? Does it necessarily privilege quantitative over qualitative, social scientific over humanistic methods? Is digital history the exclusive realm of big data? What, moreover, are the relative advantages and disadvantages of collaborative research, crowdsourcing, and web-based, open-access publishing?

In addition to discussing weekly readings we will examine a series of emerging and mature projects with an eye to assessing the scope of innovation and knowledge-production enabled by digital history methods. Through a series of brief “toolkit” assignments we will get our hands dirty wielding some of the most common DH tools (blogging platforms, social bookmarking, data visualization, text analysis, and neogeography). Finally, you will have an opportunity to apply digital methods to your own research by designing and executing a project based on materials gathered either specifically for this purpose or for the production of a ‘traditional’ work of history (seminar paper, thesis, dissertation chapter, etc.). Everyone will present their findings, participate in peer review of each other’s work, and reflect on the application of digital history methods in a brief final paper.

*Please note:* Though the course is designed to accommodate the novice digital historian, students with any level of digital literacy are most welcome. Open to advanced undergraduates with the consent of the instructor.

## Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance and active participation are crucial. Each unexcused absence will automatically reduce your participation grade (from A to A-). In the case of an excused absence (due to illness, work or family responsibilities, etc.), you must submit all assignments, 4 response posts, and a second primary post on a topic related to the week's readings before the next seminar meeting.

Laptops: You are encouraged to bring a laptop with you each week as we will use them during toolkit sessions and website critiques. Laptop use will be allowed during discussion though I beg and plead that you refrain from checking email and non-course related websites. Use of smart phones is not permitted in seminar.

Readings: Nearly all the readings for the course are free and online. You will find them in the Diigo library tagged "Week1" "Week2" etc. The Diigo library contains several recommended readings (tagged WeekXsupplement). There are also 3 books required for purchase (see Tufte, Bodenhamer, Moretti). You can find copies online or at the COOP.

Late work: Unexcused late work will drop one grade automatically and again every 24 hours. Late work will not be accepted after 48 hours unless you have been in contact with and obtained permission from me.

Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis and only when requested more than 72 hours prior to the deadline.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with the professor by September 13. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

Academic integrity: Any instance of cheating will be handled in accordance with Harvard policy. Your work must be original, and all sources cited in accordance with the Chicago/Turabian standards (projects and digital objects posted online must have complete metadata, which includes the full bibliographic information required by Turabian though it will likely appear in a format determined by pre-set fields). Collaboration on assignments and projects is warmly encouraged. Collaboration on written work (blog entries, papers) is not allowed.

## Requirements & Grading

Non-graded requirements: You must register with and/or install Zotero, Diigo (with Awesome Screenshot extension), Evernote and Omeka prior to the week 2 seminar meeting. You must accept invitations to join course groups, and register with and/or install other tools as necessary over the course of the semester.

Active seminar participation: 30%

This includes regular, informed and, might I hope, enthusiastic? participation in seminar discussions, weekly blogging (on WordPress), and the virtual workshop.

Because most of the readings are available online, I would like us to maximize **Diigo's potential as a social research tool** by making a practice of (to the extent we are able) using the highlight, comment, and tag features as we work through the material. There are various ways to do this: you can comment on the whole page or, if you prefer to comment on a particular passage, first highlight it and then use a sticky note (rest your cursor on the highlighted material and use the drop down menu). You can also use the "Awesome Screenshot" extension to capture and annotate full or partial screen views. They will save to your personal Diigo library – be sure to share them to the Group. No need to do this exhaustively. Think of it as a way of capturing texts or ideas or sites or images you'd like to return to in seminar discussion. Finally, I've done minimalist tagging of our material – I leave that job to all of you. We will review our collective Diigo work periodically over the semester.

**Blog posts** are due Sundays at 9pm. Each must have at least 2 thematic tags. Each must be assigned a category marking the assignment week. Read all posts and respond to at least 2 comments or replies by 9am Tuesday. Replies can be brief (a sentence or two), but they must be thoughtful. *Please bear in mind that a blog post is not an essay.* For better or for worse, blogs tend to be

- informal, and possibly even imperfect;
- aware of, and often in conversation with, their audience;
- pithy (aim for 300 words, though this is not a hard and fast rule);
- scannable (viewers consume web content differently than they do printed material – consider revisiting the art of the bullet-point list);
- framed by compelling titles & subheadings;
- infused with hyperlinks and images.

Toolkit assignments: 20%

Roll up your sleeves and dive in! These exercises are designed to expose you to the proverbial tip of the iceberg of digital methods and tools. You will find some unexpectedly complex and others reassuringly simple. Don't leave them to the last minute. Due 9am Tuesdays.

Digital history project portfolio: 50% (25% project & exhibit, 25% paper)

You will design and execute a digital history project using the software/platforms/tools of your choosing. All projects will be presented as Omeka exhibits.

- Clearly define the topic and goal of your project in a 1-2 page document posted to the Google Briefcase by **1pm on October 1**.
- Post the preliminary version of your data(base) in the Google Briefcase by **1pm, Oct. 22**.
- Explain your methodology in a post tagged "method" by **1pm on Oct. 22**. How do you plan to organize, code, manipulate, aggregate, or repackage your data in order to make it intelligible to the tools with which you plan to conduct the analysis?
- Your work must be rendered as a series of digital items (screen grabs, jpegs, maps, podcasts, film clips, etc.) added to the course Omeka account and organized into "Pages". There is no set number of required items or pages – it is up to you to decide what you need in order to create your exhibit. Be sure to 1) include the required metadata and 2) tag each item (at minimum) with a one-word tag identifier for your exhibit. You are welcome to use the Neatline plugin if you plan to annotate maps or images or use the timeline feature. **A draft version is due at 1pm on Nov. 19. This should give everyone a sense of what you are doing and what it will look like; the final project is due at 5pm on December 10.** The project bibliography must be maintained in the course Zotero library; each item must be tagged with the single-word identifier you developed for your project. Use Zotero to generate your formal bibliography and post it to the Briefcase.

- 10-12pp reflection & assessment of project outcomes due **5pm, December 10**. Post to the Briefcase and leave a hard copy in my Davis Center mailbox.

## Seminar Schedule

- 1 (Sept 3). Introduction: "Digital Humanities is not some airy Lyceum"  
 Stephen Ramsay, [Who's In and Who's Out](#)  
 Matthew K. Gold (ed.), [Debates in the Digital Humanities](#), Introduction, Part I, Part II  
 Tim O'Reilly, "[What is Web 2.0?](#)"  
 David Parry, "[The MLA, @briancroxxall, and the non-rise of the Digital Humanities](#)" & "[Be Online or Be Irrelevant](#)"  
 Marc Parry, "[Conference Humiliation](#)," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 17 November 2009  
 Dan Cohen, "[The Ivory Tower and the Open Web: Introduction: Burritos, Browsers, and Books](#)" [video]
- 2 (Sept 10). The Digital History Turn (or, a call to arms)  
 Marshall Poe, "Fighting Bad History with Good, or, Why Historians Must Get on the Web Now," *Historically Speaking* 10:2 (2009): 22-23 [available via Project Muse]  
 Roy Rosenzweig, "[Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era](#)," *American Historical Review* 108, no.3 (2003): 735-762  
 Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, [Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web](#) (2006): Introduction ("Promises and Perils of Digital History")  
 Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, eds. [Writing History in the Digital Age: a born-digital, open-review volume](#) (2012): Part 1: Re-Visioning Historical Writing  
 William G. Thomas, II, "Computing and the Historical Imagination," [A Companion to Digital Humanities](#)  
 Daniel J. Cohen, Michael Frisch, Patrick Gallagher, Steven Mintz, Kirsten Sword, Amy Murrell Taylor, William G. Thomas III, and William J. Turkel, "[Interchange: The Promise of Digital History](#)," *Journal of American History* 95 (September 2008).  
 Tim Hitchcock, "[Academic History Writing and Its Disconnects](#)," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1 No.1 (2011)

Blog prompt: Is your field well represented in the realm of digital history? Why or why not? Does it matter?

Toolkit assignment: *Information Capture and the Research Process*

- 1) Add what you consider to be a particularly effective or otherwise noteworthy blog to the Diigo library (it may or may not be history-related). Assign the tag *blog* as well as 2-3 additional tags of your choosing.
- 2) You will be randomly assigned a digital tool with which to take your notes on this week's readings. Post your notes to the Briefcase (figuring out how to do this is part of the assignment) by 9pm Monday and be prepared to share your assessment of the tool in seminar. \*Please take notes as you normally would: our focus will be on the process of information capture and sharing rather than the quality of your notes!\*

- 3 (Sept 17). From Documents to Data  
 Nicholas Carr, "[Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains](#)"  
 Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, "[Web of Lies? Historical Knowledge on the Internet](#)"

Daniel Cohen, "[The Future of Preserving the Past](#)"

Frederick Gibbs and Trevor Owens, "[The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing](#)"

Stephen Marche, [Literature is not Data: Against Digital Humanities](#)

Scott Selisker and Holger Syme, [In Defense of Data: Responses to Stephen Marche's "Literature is not Data"](#)

Tim Hitchcock, "[Academic History Writing and the Headache of Big Data](#)"

Blog prompt: The [September 11 Digital Archive](#) and [Digital Archive of Japan's 2011 Disasters](#) seek to harness the potential of crowdsourced data. What are the mechanisms through which these sites collect, organize, and vet data? Should historians approach crowdsourced data differently than they do other sources? On a (somewhat) related note, is the emergence of digital archives (the [Digital Public Library of America](#) springs to mind!) and big datasets changing how you conduct research and/or define your sourcebase? [tag: NewData]

Toolkit assignment: *What does "Big Data" Look Like?*

Go to [TweetMap](#). Log in. Read the "About" field and try out the filter. Settle on a query that interests you *and returns fewer than one million tweets*. Download the tweets. Save the CSV file to your computer, examine it, and upload it to the Briefcase. Use the comment feature to share a thought or two on content or design. Do a screenshot of your TweetMap and post the image along with a brief comment to Diigo [tag: TweetMap].

4 (Sept 24). Curating & Coding

Lev Manovich, "[Database as a Genre of New Media](#)"

Stephen Ramsay, "Databases," [A Companion to Digital Humanities](#)

Boggs, "[Digital Humanities Design and Development Process](#)" series  
[Dublin Core Metadata Initiative](#)

Familiarize yourself with Omeka & Omeka.net (roughly 30 min)

Familiarize yourself with each of these sites:

[The Valley of the Shadow](#)

[Digital Atlas of Roman and Medieval Civilization](#)

[Transatlantic Slave Trade](#)

[Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives](#)

Blog prompt: Use [these guidelines](#) to write a short review of one of the assigned websites. 600 words should suffice.

Toolkit assignment: *"Metadata is not rocket science." Or is it?*

Working in pairs, design and build a brief primer on metadata. Undergraduates are your target audience. You need to define metadata and explain its significance in their lives. You may use the medium of your choosing. Upload your primer to the Briefcase.

5 (Oct 1). Escaping Flatland: a primer in data visualization

Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (Graphics Press, 1990)

Ben Schmidt, 5-part series (plus overview) on whaling logs and digital history on his blog, "Sapping Attention"

Blog prompt: Tufte sets the bar high: "What we seek... is a rich texture of data, a comparative context, an understanding of complexity revealed with an economy of means."<sup>51</sup> Unpack the implications of applying one (or more) of Tufte's eloquently crafted principles of information design to your own work.

Toolkit assignment: Using your project data conduct an experimental visualization analysis with your assigned tool [[Tableau Public](#); [Google Fusion Tables](#); [Simile widgets](#); [Many Eyes](#)]. Be prepared to show and describe your work process and/or results. Post to Briefcase unless medium prohibits. Maximum time on this exercise = 2 hours.

## 6 (Oct 8). Spatial History I

David Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor Harris (eds.), *Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Indiana, 2010): Intro, 1-6, 10

Thomas Fisher, "[Place-Based Knowledge in the Digital Age](#)," *ArcNews* Fall 2012

Ferdinand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume 1*, chapter 5 (the rest is recommended but not required)

Spend enough time on each of these sites to get a sense of what they aim to accomplish as well as what they actually accomplish (roughly 2 hours total):

[Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System](#) (GBHGIS)

[National Historical Geographic Information System](#) (NHGIS)

[China Historical Geographic Information System](#) (CHGIS)

Blog prompt: What are the possibilities and limits of neogeography? Familiarize yourself with a few of the mapping tools/portals listed below. What were they created to do? What are users doing with them? How adaptable are they to the purposes of the historian? You will likely delve more deeply into some tools and be less attracted to others, which is fine. And beware the beguiling nature of maps – do not let this exercise consume your work time this week!

GoogleMaps    WorldMap    Timemap

GoogleEarth    NeatLine    Pastmapper

ArcGIS    MapStory    MapWarper

## 7 (Oct 15). Spatial History II

[The Spatial History Project](#) (explore the site and sample the publications)

[ORBIS](#): The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World

[HyperCities](#)

Blog prompt: David Bodenhamer draws attention to what strikes many humanists as the reductionist nature of GIS epistemology: "It forces data into categories; it defines space in limited and literal ways instead of the metaphorical frames that are equally reflective of human experience; and, while managing complexity within its data structures, it too often simplifies its mapped results in ways that obscure rather than illuminate." (*Spatial Humanities*, 24) To what extent do existing historical GIS projects address and/or cope with this challenge? Just how problematic is this (perceived?) disconnect between GIS and history?

Toolkit assignments:

- 1) You will be assigned one of the following sources to locate and download a map of the Mediterranean published prior to 1923: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection; Harvard Map Collection, NYPL Map Collection, Library of Congress Map Collection. Upload the image to the iSite Annotation page. Use the comment feature to 1) highlight significant elements of the map, 2) insert the full bibliographic information, and 3) insert a hyperlink to the source of the image. Then select, download, upload and similarly annotate a second map made prior to 1923 but sourced from a website of your choosing. Selected maps need not depict the entire Mediterranean region, but city maps are not sufficient for our purposes here. No duplicates. This should take you roughly an hour.

- 2) In week 7 we will determine a division of labor that will allow us to develop a geodatabase of Braudel's text in the [shared Google spreadsheet](#).

8 (Oct 22). Sandbox Session

Our "sandbox session" will be an open, unstructured forum for discussing ideas and issues stemming from the data, project design, methodology, etc., of the individual DH projects. Come prepared to share, brainstorm, critique and problem solve.

9 (Oct 29). Texts & Networks: "With enough stretching and molding, you too could have a network analysis problem!"

Scott Weingart, "[Demystifying Networks, Parts I & II](#)," *Journal of Digital Humanities* vol.1, no.1 (Winter 2011)

Elijah Meeks, "[More Networks in the Humanities or Did books have DNA?](#)"

Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (Verso, 2005): 1-64

Download [Gephi](#) and work through the Quick Start Guide.

**Blog prompt:** Describe the data you plan to use for your project. In what ways (if any) does it differ – in breadth, depth, format, etc. – from the "data" you have used to write papers in the past? How are you dealing with problems of information density, sample size, etc.?

**Toolkit assignment:** Plug the RSS feed URL of the blog you selected in week 2 into the upload box in both [Wordle](#) and [Voyeur](#). Capture and save the initial word clouds. Compare them, figure out why and how they differ, and then manipulate each into a visualization that is both substantial and "beautiful". Document your method. Capture and save the final word clouds. Integrate all 4 into a blog post narrating your experiment. [tag: TextMaps] Spend no more than 2 hours on this exercise.

10 (Nov 5). From Thumbing to Scrolling: rethinking narrative in light of new media

[Robert Darnton on books, ebooks, Google Books, and the DPLA](#)

Robert Darnton, "The New Age of the Book," *The New York Review of Books* 03/18/99, vol.46, issue 5

Roy Rosenzweig and Steve Brier, "[Historians and Hypertext: Is it More than Hype?](#)"

William Thomas and Edward Ayers, "[The Difference Slavery Made: a close analysis of two American communities](#)"

William Thomas, "[Writing a Digital History Journal Article from Scratch: An Account](#)"

[Gutenberg-e](#) (sample chapters from a few different titles)

**Blog prompt:** Based on their fascination with developing "a language of exposition that works by branching and layers and connections" Thomas and Ayers suggest that "Hypertext may be especially well-suited for history." Do you agree? Is there a clear path forward for publishing of historical work? Is it dependent on the redefinition or reconfiguration of narrative structures or practices?

11 (Nov 12). The Pleasures and Perils of Digital History (for your career)

Rosenzweig, "[Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past](#)"

Cohen & Rosenzweig, *Digital History*: "Owning the Past"

Cohen, [The Other Academy Awards](#)

*Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no.4 (2012): [Closing the Evaluation Gap](#)

[\[MLA\] Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media](#)

Blog prompt: Based on your toolkit assignment work, do you support the MOOC movement? Explain your position.

Toolkit assignment: *The Terrible, Wonderful MOOC*

Massive open online courses are all the rage. They are also one of the most hotly contested topics in the world of digital humanities. Publications on MOOCs are prolific and diverse. Your task is to collaborate with your classmates on a shared Evernote notebook that captures and organizes what everyone ought to know about MOOCs (a landscape of information to be defined by the collective). For this exercise cooperation and data management are as important as content.

12 (Nov 19) & 13 (Nov 26). Project Presentations & Virtual Workshop

Over these 2 weeks you will present your work in seminar and on Omeka; you will also offer constructive feedback on each peer project. Comments can be free-standing posts or replies to other comments. All feedback must be posted by 9pm Dec.1.

14 (Dec 3). In the Classroom

[Debates in the Digital Humanities](#), Part V: Teaching the Digital Humanities  
Read any 4 of these essays on [Teaching Digital History](#)

Assignment: Develop a lesson plan for an undergraduate lecture course based on your DH project. Imagine that you have set aside 30 minutes of class time to complete the lesson. The plan should describe (bullet points are fine) the learning objectives, the activity, and the method of post-activity assessment. The document should run one or two pages. Upload your plan to the Briefcase.

Blog prompt: Track down a teaching fellow, preferably in history (not necessarily at Harvard) charged with integrating digital learning into their course. Pick their brains on what worked and what didn't, and report back.

Closing Conversation: The Dirty Little Secrets of Digital History  
December 10, 7-9pm  
location TBD