# "Africa for the Africans?" – Mapmaking, Lagos, and the Colonial Archive

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**Abstract**: In early colonial Lagos, struggles over race, place and identity were played out over ownership of land, and ended with the displacement of sections of the indigenous population. "Africa for the Africans" combines texts and maps to narrate the history of 1860s Lagos. This article demonstrates how, with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), European colonial maps can be used to analyze the significance of changing urban spatial relationships in 1860s Lagos. Though much of this analysis employs GIS, it also leans heavily on other tools for making timelines, story maps and vector diagrams. This process of creating digital representations of the past also has pedagogical applications, as these methods can be extended to the classroom for undergraduates learning about African history.

**Résumé**: Dans la Lagos du début de la période coloniale, les luttes entremêlant race, lieu et identité se jouaient sur la propriété des terres et se terminaient par le déplacement de segments de la population indigène. "L'Afrique pour les Africains" combine des textes et des cartes pour raconter l'histoire de Lagos des années 1860. Cet article montre comment, avec les systèmes d'information géographique (SIG), les cartes coloniales européennes peuvent être utilisées pour analyser l'importance de l'évolution des relations spatiales urbaines dans les années 1860 à Lagos. Bien qu'une grande partie de cette analyse utilise un SIG, elle s'appuie également fortement sur d'autres outils pour créer des chronologies, des cartes d'histoire et des diagrammes vectoriels. Ce processus de création de représentations numériques du passé a également des applications pédagogiques, car ces méthodes peuvent être étendues en classe pour les étudiants de premier cycle qui apprennent l'histoire africaine.

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## Introduction[1]

A walk through the town of Lagos in the first years of British colonial rule would clearly demonstrate the differences in the uses of space by its different inhabitants. On the southern edge of the island, a wide paved promenade stretched from the west to eastern ends of the island, fronting the narrow strip of houses and factories of the Europeans and the more prosperous African merchants. Only a few miles north, the cramped, winding streets between compounds were made of loose sand that became muddy near the many swamps, and any time it rained. Hawkers, usually young, and more often female, plied these narrow lanes, selling whatever items they could carry on their heads. The surfaces of the roads were the first indication of the growing divide between "Eko," the old town in the north, and "Lagos" to the south. But this was not an easy divide along racial or cultural lines.

At the same time, walking through the other quarters in the east in the early 1860s would also confirm many things. Though the mix of languages had not changed – one would hear Yoruba in its various coastal and interior iterations, English in "standard" and "broken" forms, Igbo,[2] Hausa,[3] Spanish, and Portuguese – the political changes in the city had altered the nature of economic competition and shifted the center of power. Where in the 1840s Portuguese had been spoken by men involved in the transatlantic slave trade, now it was more likely spoken by the men and women who had gained their freedom in Bahia and returned to Lagos to live freely. Likewise, the *emancipado* from Havana and the "Liberated Africans" from Freetown could converse in Spanish and English respectively. Less and less did Iga (the *ọba's* quarter) determine the future of the city, as more and more of the rules of the day were coming from Water Street, where the British Government House and Church Missionary Society were located. The island's economy grew less dependent on income from enslaving and trading people (mostly from the interior towns and villages), and more on the "legitimate commerce" in imported palm oil and cotton from these same places. But who had the strongest claim to this increasingly profitable space?

In early colonial Lagos, "Africa for the Africans" was both a question and a declaration. As a question, it was used by colonial officers to frame the

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[1] Support for this research came from Rice University's Humanities Research Center.

[2] The liberated Africans in Sierra Leone also counted Igbo among them. Joseph Harden, a black American Baptist missionary, married one of the educated Igbo in Lagos after he arrived there in 1855. Martin Robinson Delany, *Official Report of The Niger Valley Exploring Party* (New York/London: Webb, Millington and Co/Thomas Hamilton, 1861).

[3] Rescued Hausa men formed the basis of the British Consul's police force on the island. Many had been formerly enslaved at Ouidah and had escaped to Lagos. See, for instance: The National Archives, Kew, FO 84/1002, "Lodder to Russell," August 4, 1859.

discussion of who belonged in Lagos. As the latter, it was a claim made by people of African descent in response to growing racial and political tensions in new colony. In Lagos, some of the most important questions about power and place were centered on the issue of land ownership and belonging: who owned and thus controlled the land, what was it worth, who could acquire or distribute it, and how could one go about doing so? Hidden in this debate over who belonged in Lagos is the literal and figurative displacement of the local population, the *ara Eko*. Lagos was a city made up of a diverse population made up of Africans, African descended peoples, and Europeans. Each group had a voice, but not every voice has been preserved or archived. The women, men and children that the British consular authorities called "the natives" called themselves by another name: *ara Eko*. Eko was their name for their island and city. This article uses a spatial lens as a framework to begin the process of recovering their voices and experiences in the city.

They are the most elusive characters in the archives, even though they made up an estimated 60–70% percent of the population of the city. Traditionally, the historiography of the city has separated the populations into the residential quarters that they lived in as if they were whole, hermetically sealed spaces.[4] Instead, this article looks at the ways that they were connected, by examining five sites that form a network of conflict and cooperation on the island of Lagos. At the same time, in writing about Lagos, historians have imagined the political struggles in dynamic ways, but they are yet to fully grapple with the city in terms of its changing urban fabric and the active role of the landscape and environment. These histories have paid less attention to the impact of the changing spatial dynamics of these lagoon towns, especially with reference to the ways that politics and space are mutually constitutive. The city, Eko, dubbed "Lagos" by the Portuguese is muted in these narratives, where the region's geography, the island's landscape, and the city's residential quarters, markets, palace and compounds should be prominent as the places where power and ambition intersect.

In early colonial Lagos, free men and women coming from the new world carved out spaces for themselves in a society dominated numerically by Yoruba speaking peoples but now controlled politically by the British. As competition for land intensified – in a context of land scarcity and its rapidly

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[4] See, for instance, in: Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830–1890* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); Akin L. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria* (New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1969); Ayodeji Olukoju, *Infrastructure Development and Urban Facilities in Lagos, 1861–2000* (Ibadan: Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique, University of Ibadan, 2003); Liora Bigon, *A History of Urban Planning in Two West African Colonial Capitals: Residential Segregation in British Lagos and French Dakar (1850–1930)* (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

increasing value – ideas around questions of rights of access to space, political power, and above all identity were in flux. The story of how Lagos became a site of contestation for free black people has roots in the precolonial period, beginning with the "saltwater" war in 1845, the British bombardments in 1851, and after their annexation of the city in 1861. Here, the emphasis is on the period between 1861 and 1863, examining the debates around being "African" in Lagos after the transition from local to British control.

By the time the British annexed Lagos in 1861, a black reading public had developed in the city.[5] Even though there were native merchants who still endorsed contracts by "making their mark" or scribbling an "X" on the letters that they sent to the consulate or England, a new generation of the *ara Eko* had become literate in English – and some even in Yoruba – under the tutelage of the Christian missionaries in these new schools. Some Christians could read the Bible in both languages, and *Iwe Irohin*, a Yoruba language newspaper appeared in Abẹokuta in the 1850s. By 1863, there were enough literate inhabitants of the island to support a newspaper, *The Anglo-African*, published every Saturday evening by Robert Campbell (a Jamaican immigrant) from his premises on what became Oil Mill Street. His *Anglo-African* became an important venue for debate about status and identity in Lagos, and his stated editorial policy to publish in the best interest of Lagosians led to lively debates in the years of its existence between 1863 and 1865.

This article examines a fleeting moment in Lagos in 1863 where the local people, through their king, *ọba* Dosunmu, imagined they could snatch their city back. But what was the city that they wanted, and how had it changed since their *ọba* had lost power? To answer these questions, I draw from the editorials in the emerging Lagos press, the letters of British Consuls, governors and "Liberated Africans" returning to the Bight of Benin, and the maps, books, and pamphlets published about this part of West Africa, to demonstrate how questions of race and identity in an urban context interacted in determining who was local or foreign, and how that in turn factored into the reconstruction of space. Well known histories of Lagos have emphasized the physical space between the centers of each population as symbolic of their social distance, pointing out the ways the Saro in Olowogbowo, the Europeans on Water Street and Brazilians in "Portuguese Town" maintained their cultures and ambitions separate from the *ara Eko* who were imagined as largely confined to the Iga quarter, now the center of "Old Town." A closer examination of the actual circulation of people and ideas to and through the city offers a different picture of the social and spatial relations in Eko.

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[5] Robert Campbell, *A Few Facts, Relating to Lagos, Abbeokuta, and Other Sections of Central Africa* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1860), 7. By 1861, there were five missionary schools operating in Lagos and their congregations were made up of Saro and "native" peoples, and although the *ara Eko* often lacked interest in these new institutions, they sent their children instead.

The maps reveal that there were no clear ways to draw lines between their allegiances. For some *Saro* for instance, even though their racial background and ethnic identity meant that they were closely linked to the local populations in Lagos and in the lagoon cities beyond, their conversion to Christianity and western education meant that they also had something significant in common with the Europeans. The same was true for the returning men and women from Brazil, Cuba, the United States, and Jamaica. Antagonism between the local Africans and the British was often clearly defined along racial lines – there was an uneasy peace between the British and the locals. In this early colonial state, it was less clear what role the Saro and other immigrants would play, as they navigated these spaces between these populations.

We see black African missionaries like Rev. Morgan, the so-called "agents of civilization" living among the Lagosians, and indigenous Lagosians like Tom Mabinuori resident in quarters like Olowogbowo, Faji, and even on Water Street. Rather than being the odd exception to the rule, their movement between spaces highlights the tensions and contradictions at play in defining and shaping not just identity, but the potential of the city to function as a home for its free, emancipated, and culturally heterogeneous population. It demonstrates how questions of race and identity in an urban context interacted in determining who was local or foreign, and how that in turn factored into the reconstruction of space.

This article combines texts and maps to narrate the history of 1860s Lagos. It focuses on the analysis of colonial maps as primary sources, and mapmaking as a method for rethinking urban histories in early colonial West Africa. It uses archival evidence, especially maps and letters, to begin the process of plotting a disappeared city, by finding its boundaries, its physical features, and plotting meaningful sites and scenes around Lagos Island. This article uses spatial technology to analyze and respond to the debates over belonging in Lagos.[6] To do this, it constructs a spatial analysis of the city, and the island on which is it was settled.

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[6] See: Allen M. Howard and Richard M. Shain (eds.), *The Spatial Factor in African History the Relationship of the Social, Material, and Perceptual* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005); Anne Kelly Knowles and Amy Hillier (eds.), *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship* (Redlands CA: ESRI Press, 2008); Edward L. Ayers, "Turning toward Place, Space, and Time," in: David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris (eds.), *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1–13; David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris (eds.), *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Detlev Mares and Wolfgang Moschek, "Place in Time: GIS and the Spatial Imagination in Teaching History," in: Alexander von Lünen and Charles Travis (eds.), *History and GIS* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 59–72; Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes (eds.), *Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS and Spatial History* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

Lagos Island was increasingly divided in the 1860s, but not by quarter as previously imagined. I argue here that the maps of Lagos – both the primary sources and newly constructed GIS versions – show the possibilities of two cities on the island as articulated in the debates over sites, and in the use of specific places. There are at least five crucial places in the rebuilt city that mark the beginning of the opening of Lagos to free populations. Mapping these sites begins the process of understanding how space and identity interacted and were mutually constitutive in Lagos; each is marked in yellow in Figure 1 below. First is Breadfruit Street, a promenade in the western part of the city, marked by the distinctive Breadfruit trees that lined it. Because of the mythology around the presence of a former slave market at the site of the breadfruit trees, this site's evolution marked it as a space that represented freedom and the new Saro population. The section of the town defined by Water Street (and sometimes called the Esplanade) is the second site. What began as the back of the city, a literal dumping ground eventually became the space for Europeans in the city.

Third is "Iron Coffin," as Government House was known because of the constant turnover of consuls who died from dysentery and or malaria. Regardless, it became the focal point of the growing European settlement along Water Street. The Christian burial ground, located north east of the

**Figure 1. Five places in early colonial Lagos. The sites marked in yellow are the places where meaning an identity were debated in 1863. The map in this figure was created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved. For more information about Esri® software, please visit www.esri.com.**

Government House, became an important space for negotiating identity around the living and the dead, as the local populations refused to stop the internment of their family members in their compounds. Lastly, the *Iga Idunganran* or king's palace in the west, manages to embody change, while simultaneously being the most enduring structure on the island. Even though it survived numerous civil wars and other strife, its power over the population could not overcome British intervention.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow a cataloging and spatial analysis of the most meaningful places in mid-nineteenth century Lagos. This database becomes important for tracking change over time and through space, as different sites become sites of negotiation over power, identity and belonging. On the largest scale, the ownership of Lagos Island itself come into question, as the ex-king denied that he had ceded his town to the British Crown.

This map of Lagos, though reproduced in two-dimensional form here, is the result of a three-dimensional process of plotting and layering information. However, only one topographic layer – that of the satellite map – is visible. This map is a result of layers of vector and raster data contained in the project's geodatabase. The topmost visible layer is a 2019 satellite map of contemporary Lagos. Georeferenced historical maps from 1891, 1898, and 1904 provide the coordinates for the historical spatial data rendered on top of it, but raster layers remain invisible for the benefit of visual clarity. The old perimeter of the island is outlined in white on top of a map of a satellite map of contemporary Lagos, showing the difference between the contemporary and historical boundaries. The outline itself is based on sixteen georeferenced maps and two sketches read for their spatial content. The earliest map of the whole island that aspires to geographical accuracy are the fourteen maps in the 1891 ordinance survey.[7] Charting this outline allows us to visualize the location of the old city, relative to contemporary Lagos. Walking on the new Marina today may feel like the edge of the island, giving the impression that there was a wider buffer between buildings like Cathedral Church of Christ and Government House.[8] These sites are tied together in many ways, but perhaps most strikingly in the events of 12 September 1863, when allegations of treason against the ex-king laid bare the fragile ties that ostensibly bound the old and new populations in the city of Lagos.

In early September 1863, rumors of war and the possibility of another bombardment circulated wildly around Lagos Island, reaching even the colonial governor. "The entire town," he wrote, "is in an agitated state."[9]

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[7] The National Archives, Kew, CO 700/Lagos 14, *Plan of the Town of Lagos, West Africa (in 15 Sheets)*, 1891, 1 inch to 88 feet.

[8] In fact, the original southern edge of the city was further inland. In the north east, the only traces of lagoons like Idumagbo and Isalęgangan are in the shapes of the streets that echo their presence. The same is true in Alakoro and Ęlęgbata in the west.

[9] The National Archives, Kew, CO 147/4, "Lt. Governor John Glover to The Duke of Newcastle. No 96," 10 October 1863.

Twenty-five months of British rule, he added, had brought change too quickly, and the *ara Eko* were rebelling. Of the estimated forty-thousand people who resided in the fledgling colony, there were only a few dozen Europeans and a few thousand immigrants. The rest were the *ara Eko*. However despite their numerical advantage, in August 1861 their leader, *ọba* Dosunmu, had ceded the town and island to the British crown, ushering in a new regime.

In the sections that follow, I first explore the historical and political contexts of the new colony before turning to the ways that spatial analysis can provide answers for questions posed around sites of conflict and belonging. This analysis rests on using maps as sources, and mapmaking as method. These are examined together as tools to rethink the storytelling with cities as the subject. Finally, it discusses the significance of digital storytelling, and how technology can be applied in teaching the histories of West African cities in undergraduate research classes.

## "Africa for the Africans?"

On the night of 12 September 1863, there was commotion in the north and southern ends of the city. In the south, rumors of treason by *ọba* Dosunmu had triggered a swift reaction from John Glover, the British Lt. Governor. There were reports that Dosunmu had appealed to the French on the western lagoons at Porto Novo to take possession of Lagos, and that he had also arranged to attack the British residents. In a flurry of activity, messengers were dispatched around the Marina to all "*true* and *loyal* subjects of the Queen," asking them to assemble, armed, at the Government House at 10 am the next morning. In the *Iga* quarter, there was confusion, as the women and children prepared to flee in anticipation of retaliation by the British. Glover summoned the ex-king to answer to the charge of treason, adding that if he did not arrive by 10.30 am, the gunboat *Handy* and tug *Tender* would sail around the Lagos Lagoon and bombard his quarter.

In Olowogbowo, located between the palace in the north and the Europeans in the south, there was a quiet unease. From Breadfruit Street, only a mile or so from the ex-king's quarter, the Saro (Sierra Leonean immigrants) could hear the noisy stampede as the ex-king's wives and children bundled themselves and their valuables into canoes to escape. They could also see the English merchants "galloping up and down Water street with swords in brazen scabbards, revolvers, and well furnished with equipments [sic] for action."[10] No one had informed them of what was going on,

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[10]  *The Anglo-African's* reporters published different accounts of the story, stating that they had gone to great pains "in learning from both sides the details connected with these occurrences." See: A British Subject, "Communication: To the Editor of The Anglo-African," *The Anglo-African* 1, 16th edition (19 September 1863), 3.

and they had been left out of the potential skirmish between the Europeans and other Africans. Eventually, the matter was settled without any violence.[11] However, a week later, a concerned "letter to the editor" appeared in *The Anglo-African*. The author, who assumed a pseudonym, wrote:

> It was rumored among Europeans that there would be a commotion on that day by the ex-king and his people… The white men, merchants, as rumored, were warned to prepare to defend their property. Among us, the hundreds of black men, merchants, traders, men of property, British subjects, influential men, at least among their own people, no one had the slightest information of this expected disturbance.[12]

They had been left out of the rallying cry, and some were very bitter about it. The author continued, "my own opinion and the opinion of everyone is, that we are considered as outcasts, and *counted with the enemy*." The enemy in this case were of course the *ara Eko*, the native inhabitants of Lagos. Such a strongly worded statement has to be evaluated within Lagos's social and political milieu. The person who penned the letter was most likely a Saro man,[13] the same group that the British had grown wary of in the colony. In fact, not long before this event there were reports that Dosunmu relied on a rather radical (read: anti British colonialism) set of Sierra Leonean immigrants that he kept as advisers, especially in his dealings with the British consular officers and merchants.[14]

> This is not the first time that Docemo [sic] caused trouble in the town. His advisers are that class of Sierra Leone people whose motto is "Africa for the Africans," who would rejoice to see their benefactors and supporters, the English, either swept from the Coast or subjected to the dominion of the blacks, and who are instrumental in fostering the hatred of the Egbas towards Lagos, and opposing the views of this Government on every occasion.[15]

[11]  Dosunmu was fined fifty pounds to defray the cost of deploying two more ships to protect the Europeans in the town as a consequence of the disturbance, and two of his chiefs were exiled to Cape Coast Castle in the Gold Coast Colony.

[12]  A British Subject, "Communication: To the Editor of The Anglo-African."

[13]  If he considered himself a British subject in Lagos, and was not a European, he had most likely come to Lagos from Freetown, where the liberated Africans were if not entirely officially British subjects, were seen as having a special relationship with the British government, under whose protection they lived.

[14]  Dosunmu relied on Sierra Leonean clerks for a range of bureaucratic activities. They transcribed his official letters, helped in measuring plots of land, etc. See: The National Archives, Kew, FO 84/950 or FO 84/1088, "Docemo to Consul Lodder," October 1859, for one of several examples.

[15]  The National Archives, Kew, CO 147/4, "Stanhope Freeman to The Duke of Newcastle," 29 June 1863.

Many consular officials found their motto, "Africa for the Africans" quite unsettling, and frequently reported them as rabble-rousers in correspondence to their superiors in the Foreign Office. But which Africa, and for which Africans? And who would determine which was which? A spatial reading of this event, based on mapping the relationships between these places marked throughout the city offers insights into the significance of these developments.

## Spatial Histories, Historical GIS, and Nineteenth Century Lagos

> But place is also a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience. Sometimes this way of seeing can seem to be an act of resistance against a rationalization of the world, a way of seeing that has more space than place.[16]

A spatial history of Lagos investigates how the city, island and coast changed as a result of human agency, looking at its growth, development and decline, and how this was expressed in the urban fabric. As such, I argue that reading this dynamic collage – as it represents the dense overlapping edges and interior of the city and island – gives unparalleled access to the history of the city. The new map in this article (Figure 1 above) is plotted to provoke questions, rather than just to settle debates about the contours of the built environment. Why, and when, does it matter what the city is called? One attempt to settle that question was in 1861 with the annexation of the city. Still, today, when older people say they are going *to* Eko, it is widely understood that their destination is Lagos Island, and not the parts of the city that have spread towards Lekki, and across wide swathes of the mainland to the north, west and east. Eko in the 1840s was a small yet intensely crowded space.

Urban history is "profoundly spatial."[17] In this case, spatial histories are best served by visual sources that articulate – to whatever extent possible – the shape of the city, the use of space, and the sorts of relationships people have with their environment, and how they shape it. Very few maps of Lagos from this time period have survived. The "fuzziness" of historical data resists the basic tenets of GIS's need to be "discrete" and location specific. This problem is multiplied exponentially in the case of colonial Lagos where much of the Yoruba-speaking populations that made up the bulk of the city were not literate.

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[16] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2015), 22.

[17] Leif Jerram, "Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis?," *History and Theory* 52 (2013), 400–419.

Spatial analysis plays a critical role in reconstructing the city as a basis for those whose appearance in the archives is limited and fragmentary. So in a way, the spaces that they invested meaning in or resisted become stand ins or metaphors or evidence of their own existence. While the initial hypothesis was based on the newspaper accounts and the colonial letters between the Lt. Governor and the Colonial Office, it soon became clear that without an intimate understanding of the island's layout, the full implications and significance of the claims in the correspondence would not be clear. This article relies on a GIS geodatabase built with sources that include editorial and letters printed in the *Anglo-African* newspaper, letters by John Glover, and a series of maps of Lagos island produced by Glover himself and other later cartographers of the island and area. It takes spatial data from these sources to see how patterns of belonging and power were plotted around the city of Lagos, from Government House in the south, to the Oba's palace in the northwest. This research illustrates how patterns of settlement, development, and contestation can be evidence of shifting allegiances and constructions of identity.

GIS offers opportunities to both read and create new maps, and has three specific benefits for researchers interested in asking questions how spatial data help articulate change through time: using spatial data to build databases, visualizing this data on maps, and finally analyzing the relationships between the locations.[18] Scholars have pointed to "places" as "qualities, practices, beliefs, representations, and symbols that cluster at [a] location."[19] Further, "place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power."[20] However, concepts like space and place have not always been employed in the most precise ways, and are in fact sometimes used in a way that suggests that they represent the same idea. One critic of the lack of precision in the "spatial turn" suggests the consideration of a "platial" turn instead, as a useful if inelegant response to the confusions of the terminology used by historians.[21] In this conception, scholars can rely on another concept – location – as a bridge between space and place. If so, Leif Jerram, offers that we can then see how "space is material, location is relational or positional, place is meaningful."[22] Evidence of many of these *places* exist most clearly in the historical maps of the city.

Brian Harley, a geographer, was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the ways that maps, and mapmaking should be critical sites of inquiry for historians. In his landmark 1989 article, "Deconstructing the Map," he questioned the idea that maps have a straightforward relationship with the reality

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[18] Donald A. DeBats and Ian N. Gregory, "Introduction to Historical GIS and the Study of Urban History," *Social Science History* 35–4 (2011), 455–463, 454. Ian N. Gregory and Richard G. Healey, "Historical GIS: Structuring, Mapping and Analysing Geographies of the Past," *Progress in Human Geography* 31–5 (2007), 638–653, 639.

[19] Jerram, "Space," 403.

[20] Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 22.

[21] Jerram, "Space."

[22] Jerram, "Space," 404.

**Figure 2. John Glover's 1859 "Sketch of the Lagos River."[28]**



they purport to represent. Harley pointed to the ways that mapmaking is a representational project, with silences and omissions that are just as powerful and significant as the features that cartographers choose to represent. It is important that scholars pay heed to the ways that maps have made and continue to make arguments about Africa and Africans. And in the ways that we use them as part of our teaching tools in the classroom. Historical maps are useful as primary sources, but their static nature means that they can usually only be read as an argument for a particular moment in time. GIS and story maps change this basic view, allowing for the reading of change through time coupled with change through space.[23] As Mares and Moschek show, the use of GIS can "turn the users themselves into the map makers."[24] Maps, therefore, are complex renderings of place. While some scholars have argued that maps generally pose questions about space, other have shown how maps themselves can make arguments in response to both historical and spatial questions. Here, I argue that because sequential maps of the same space offer a certain intertextuality, they can both pose and answer questions.

For the analysis of place and identity in 1860s Lagos, one of the most important steps in creating a geodatabase is the georeferencing of the historical maps that visualize Lagos and its lagoons. Altogether, there are over a dozen European maps that frame the transformation of Lagos, from 1859 up to the early twentieth century. The earliest is John Glover's sketch of the island and lagoons around Lagos in 1859[25] which is Figure 2 above. The most

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[23]  Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 63.

[24]  Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 63.

[25]  The National Archives, Kew, FO 925/467, *Lagos River by Lieut. J.H. Glover, R.N. 1859*, 1859.

geographical accurate is Speeding's survey of the harbor in 1898,[26] and finally the most detailed in terms of geographical elevation and street level detail is the 1908 survey of Lagos Island.[27] Between them are maps of the Marina, sketches of the swamp filling schemes and the ordinance surveys of the city that first appeared in 1891.[28]

In a way, the spatial turn ushered in the use of technologies like GIS for producing historical research. Ralph Kingston has shown how historians' embrace of the concepts of space and place solidified the position of GIS in "creating dynamic, interactive digital visualizations of change over space and time."[29] As he wrote in 2010, "space and place are firmly on the map."[30] Perhaps urban history has benefited the most from advances in Historical GIS (HGIS), because of the ways that it has privileged the built and physical environment, and how these have shaped the past.[31] HGIS exists at the intersection of scholarly inquiry around spatial and temporal differentiation.[32] "The real test," argue Gregory and Healey, "for HGIS is to create new insights into the geographies of the past."[33] HGIS allows historians to enter historiographical debates in three key ways. First by investigating settled questions, secondly by exploring questions that have not been answered satisfactorily, or in many cases, introduce new questions.[34] This article forms a combination of the last two uses, as it looks at the debate over the formation of residential quarters on Lagos Island in the early 1860s. It is this commitment or fidelity to strict geographical "accuracy" that prompted early accusations that GIS represented an unwelcome return to positivism in humanities scholarship.[35] In this case, Lagos Island in the 1860s is the context

[26] The National Archives, Kew, CO 700/Lagos 19, *Lagos Harbour by William C. Speeding, F.G.R.S., Harbour Master*, April 1898, 1 inch to 1,600 feet.

[27] The National Archives, Kew, CO 700/Lagos 31, *Plan of the Town of Lagos*, May 1904.

[28] The National Archives, Kew, FO 925/467, *Lagos River by Lieut. J. H. Glover, R. N.*

[29] Ralph Kingston, "Mind Over Matter?: History and the Spatial Turn," *Cultural and Social History* 7–1 (2010), 111–121, 111.

[30] Kingston, "Mind over Matter?," 111.

[31] This is particularly evident in studies of very large cities such as in Mabogunje's work on Nigerian cities, see: Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria*; Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[32] Anne Kelly Knowles, *Past Time, Past Place: GIS for History* (Redlands CA: ESRI Press, 2002), xii.

[33] Gregory and Healey, "Historical GIS," 644.

[34] Gregory and Healey, "Historical GIS," 644.

[35] Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes, "Introduction: From Historical GIS to Spatial Humanities: Deepening Scholarship and Broadening Technology," in: Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes (eds.), *Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS and Spatial History* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), ix–xix, xiii.

for studying race and belonging in a city, post-emancipation, and the study of how the meanings of specific spaces change.

More recently, scholars have critiqued the utility of GIS for historians more pointedly.[36] Using GIS for research involves a significant investment in time to learn the skills required, the assembly of large datasets, and of course the framing of historical questions that can benefit from all the accumulated knowledge. But given the significant drawbacks, "is it [even] worth it?" The lack of plentiful empirical data that drives GIS and other such applications is one of the main bottlenecks in the use of GIS for precolonial and colonial West African cities. Though ArcGIS and other tools have proved useful in the spatial analysis of London, Paris, New York and other such well documented cities, these data hungry applications are often less compelling in studying African history, where sources on the precolonial past are scarce, and the interpretation of the written or drawn sources that do exist requires a more flexible process. The second problem is methodological; European visitors to the region produced most of the visual and written sources for the nineteenth century. This kind of work then leans more heavily towards the qualitative applications of GIS.

In 2014, Gregory and Geddes demonstrated the ways that HGIS was both increasing its depth – in terms of its application – and breadth, when it comes to its "technical scope." The evidence for GIS projects is broadly divided into two categories: spatial data and attribute data. Put more succinctly, "attribute data say *what,* and spatial data say *where.*"[37] GIS is perhaps best suited to quantitative analysis, based on large datasets aligned along administrative and political units such as census data. However, they point to three distinct advantages in the uses of HGIS, all arranged around its spatiality: the structuring, visualization and analysis of evidence. For historians – especially of Africa – one of the most critical challenges to using ArcGIS and other similar geospatial tools is the "implied certainty" that comes from placing sites. This problem, as recognized by historian Anne Knowles, may "by default assign geographical location at a level of precision that may far exceed the precision of the source."

## From the Iron Coffin to Government House: Seizing Lagos

The estimates of the Lagos population fluctuated wildly in the 1860s. On the lower end of the scale, Lagos was assumed to be home to around thirty to forty thousand people.[38] By 1861, approximately a quarter or third of the

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[36] Alexander von Lünen, "So Long, and Thanks for the GIS: Digital Spatial History," in: Sam Griffiths and Alexander von Lünen (eds.), *Spatial Cultures: Towards a New Social Morphology of Cities Past and Present* (London/New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 193–201.

[37] Gregory and Geddes, "Introduction," x–xi.

[38] The higher estimates reached 40,000 for the same period. One outlier is Burton's estimate of 80,000 in July 1861. See, for instance, in: Ord, RE, "Testimony -

population was thought to comprise of returnees, with the Sierra Leoneans alone making up a fifth of the population.[39] A small percentage of the returnees where runaway slaves who had escaped from Ouidah. By 1861, there were probably around 500 of them in Lagos who had fled the "ill-treatment" of those who presumed to own and sell them; A few had also come from Abeokuta, Ijebu, and Ibadan where, as in Lagos, there was still a thriving system of domestic slavery.[40] There were around 800 Muslims, and less than 30 Europeans resident on the island.

Dosunmu became ọba in 1853 (after his father, ọba Akitoye, died suddenly). However, his reign was plagued with instability from having to manage the competing internal and external interests in Eko. On one hand was the threat of local rebellions and even invasion from Kosọkọ, the ọba ousted by the bombardment in 1851. On the other were the demands of the Christian missionaries and returnees from West Africa beyond, palm oil traders, and his own people. The presence of a series of British consuls and other administrators was another complication. Robert Smith, a historian, covers this tense political period in his book *The Lagos Consulate.*[41]

The influence of the European (especially British) residents of Lagos was increasing. To William McCoskry and other British administrators and traders, it was clear that the political situation at Lagos was untenable – especially since it threatened the palm oil trade.[42] From their perspective, as ọba, he was ineffective, as he was unable to control his subjects and maintain stability in Lagos. McCoskry had been a merchant in Lagos since the bombardment, and in 1861 was functioning as the acting consul in the city after the death of consul Henry Foote. Dosunmu's perceived ineffectiveness put the agreements negotiated in early treaties at risk; plans began to emerge from the "Iron Coffin" to remedy the situation. In his own words, until August of 1861, "the consul practically governed the country (…) and was the man to whom they [the inhabitants] all applied to redress in any matter of dispute."[43] The idea to annex Lagos enjoyed broad support, and

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April 6 1865," in: *Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast)* (Ordered, by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1865), 85 in response to question 2020.

[39] William McCoskry, Esq., "Testimony - April 6 1865," in: *Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast)* (Ordered, by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1865), 68 in response to question 1457.

[40] William McCoskry, Esq., "Testimony - April 6 1865," in: *Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast)* (Ordered, by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1865), 71–72 in response to questions 1578–1581.

[41] Robert Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

[42] McCoskry was an "old hand" with many years of experience as a trader in the Bight of Benin. He was acting consul of Lagos just before the annexation.

[43] William McCoskry, Esq., "Testimony - April 6 1865," in: *Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast)* (Ordered, by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1865), 67 in response to questions 1449 and 1451.

soon the plans were put in motion. McCoskry, working with the support of naval officers, laid their plans bare: Britain would take control of Lagos and replace him. Instead of a consul, there would be a Governor. He would be given a generous pension. Dosunmu refused to give a firm answer, and insisted that he would have to consult his chiefs, but would respond by the first of August. In 1863, the sad scene was replayed in the pages of *the Anglo-African*:

> The remark "*mo ofi illu mi torreh*," I have not made a present of my town, the ex-king does not deny having said, and indeed repeated it in the presence of the governor at the conference on Sunday… By it however he doubtless means, and otherwise in the most distinct manner, he persists in saying that the cession was not his voluntary act. "Did I not in the Government House," said he to the Governor interpreter, "refuse to sign? Did I not refuse on board the *Prometheus*? At my place did I not also refuse to sign?" It is now too late, however, to complain; whether voluntary or otherwise he did affix the seal used instead of signature to the articles of cession, and lies since confirmed the act; and has been receiving in accordance with its terms a pension of twelve hundred bags of cowries, equivalent to the average amount of his former revenues.[44]

With the reins of power firmly in their hands, the newly empowered British administrators set about the task of transforming Lagos into a city that matched its delegation as the newest British colony in West Africa. McCoskry, as Acting Governor (now writing to the Colonial Office from the former consulate, now "Government House"), appealed for the funds necessary to accomplish these tasks to improve their swampy colony.

Seizing the city, politically, was never going to be enough. In fact, British officials knew that the space had to be transformed to transformed to match the new reality and had indeed began this process, right after the reduction of the city in late 1852. In an 1863 editorial, Robert Campbell commented on the increasing alienation of the *ara Eko*. He noted how no Europeans or those he called "civilized people" lived with them; he also added how he thought they were satisfied with the conditions in their section of the city, and wanted to live without interference from the colonial administration.[45]

In the colonial report for 1863, the next governor noted the ill effects that the change to British rule had wrought, writing that "British law, no matter how mildly and considerately administered, had struck a deathblow at the many of the habits, customs and prejudices of the inhabitants of Lagos."[46]

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[44]  A British Subject, "Communication: To the Editor of The Anglo-African."
[45]  A British Subject, "Communication: To the Editor of The Anglo-African."
[46]  The National Archives, Kew, CO 150, "Lagos. No. 14 (1863)," in: *The Reports Exhibiting the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the Year 1863*, Part I. West Indies and Mauritius (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1864), 40.

Nowhere were these disruptions clearer than in the disputes over burial practices and the destruction of houses to widen roads. In 1862, the colonial government had estimated that they would spend around £560 on the construction of roads, streets and bridges. Instead, they spent nearly double that, with just over £869 going towards covering the costs of "houses pulled down" and compensation for the owners.[47]

It began with the announcement of the intention to build new streets, a new marketplace and a cemetery in the center of Lagos. Some of this was triggered by the announcement of a new ordinance in the city. In the letter from the *ọba*, he reported that the people and elders "were unable to acquiesce" to his demands to stop burying the dead in their homes, or to the widening of the streets. Analyzing local responses to "improvement" schemes reveals that symbolic value that people assigned to spaces; for instance showing the effects that street making had on families whose homes were demolished to widen roads like Water Street, or to create the cemetery in Faji: Taking away their homes meant severing an ancestral link, and forcing people to bury their dead outside their homes only exacerbated the issue.

## Teaching with Spatial Analysis

Because GIS (and its related tools) transform spatial information quickly and visually, it is especially useful in the classroom for exploring historical data and answering historical questions. In their 2011 article, Donald DeBats and Ian Gregory demonstrate how GIS can turn mapmaking into a "dynamic exploratory process."[48] Detlev Mares and Wolfgang Moschek argue that bringing GIS into the classroom can make history "more interesting, more modern and even more available and consumable."[49] Many of these insights about spatial history and HGIS can be adapted quite seamlessly for pedagogical use, especially into classrooms to teach students about the past in West Africa. I have introduced these methods into two newly designed classes: "Introduction to Spatial Humanities"[50] and most recently in Winter 2020 at the University of California, Riverside, as "Digital Storytelling: Historical Approaches to the City in Africa." Both classes share a common goal: to demonstrate how digital tools can be used for research, analysis and crafting

[47] The National Archives, Kew, CO 150, "Lagos. No. 14 (1863) Enclosure 2 in No. 14," in: *The Reports Exhibiting the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the Year 1863*, Part I. West Indies and Mauritius (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1864), 45.

[48] DeBats and Gregory, "Introduction to Historical GIS and the Study of Urban History," 454.

[49] Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 69.

[50] Co-taught at Rice University in the spring 2017 semester with Shannon Iverson, an anthropologist.

rigorous public facing narratives about the past. These tools expand engage with the traditional tools for historical by adding the benefits of thinking visually, to standard mores of thinking chronologically and spatially.

Bailey and Schick have shown how it is GIS's ability to "manage, analyze and visually portray spatially referenced data"[51] that has allowed historians – both scholars and students – to embrace it as a tool for understanding the past. One of the benefits of HGIS and other tools is the introduction of "spatial thinking" to the portfolio of skills that make up critical thinking.[52] While students are often encouraged to think about change through time, the ways that spaces are produced and represented through time is not nearly as popular. But the same limitations that apply to historians apply even more so to students, as the limits imposed by budgets, lack of powerful computers or instructional support can adversely affect the kinds of learning and projects that can be developed.[53]

Though GIS was not created with the historian in mind, Mares and Moschek point to an exciting possibility for students: that the "maps produced in GIS [are] not necessarily the final result of the research project, but rather a preliminary tool that raises new questions and calls for new analysis."[54] These courses were designed as joint ventures, exploring the relationship between digital technology and histories of cities in precolonial and colonial Africa. Students considered three related questions that are key to the intersection of digital methods and history: What counts as evidence of the past, and what shapes the questions that we ask? How can we narrate and visualize histories of African cities? And finally, how can we leverage digital humanities tools to tell new stories about precolonial and colonial history?

Students answered these questions using a wide array primary and secondary sources, but at the center of each question was the ways that historical maps could be used as sources, and how new maps of the world can shape arguments about the past. Because tools like ArcGIS have a steep learning curve that is difficult to overcome in a fast-paced ten-week quarter system, they learned more nimble, intuitive tools from Northwestern University's free KnightLab suite of applications, especially TimelineJS, StoryMapJS and JuxtaposeJS.[55]

Learning these tools had specific pedagogical aims around interpreting evidence, similar to any history course. For primary source analysis, they used TimelineJS to read and organize their sources into timelines with thematic

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[51] Timothy J. Bailey and James B.M. Schick, "Historical GIS: Enabling the Collision of History and Geography," *Social Science Computer Review* 27–3 (2009), 291–296.

[52] Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 59.

[53] Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 64.

[54] Mares and Moschek, "Place in Time," 65.

[55] The KnightLab storytelling tools are available for free online at https://knightlab.northwestern.edu/

**Figure 3. Screenshot of student projects using StorymapJS and TimelineJS.**



SAMPLE STUDENT PROJECTS

Skills Assignments: Secondary Source Analysis.
Using KnightLab's StoryMapJS and TimelineJS
*Thinking about the range of historical urban experiences in Africa,*
*spatially and chronologically.*
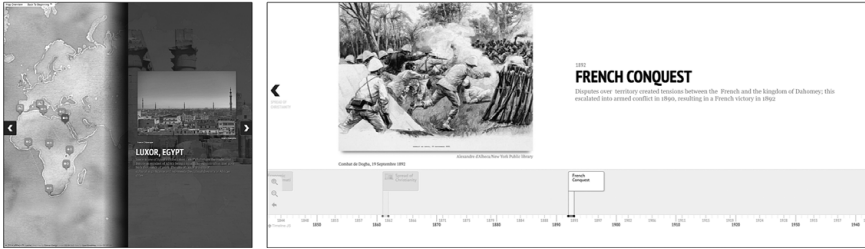
chronologies; each student had a project that was based on developing a historical argument, and they used the individual frames in the software as evidence to buttress their arguments. Using StoryMapJS, they performed analysis of secondary sources that focused on the diversity of the urban experience in Africa (see Figure 3 above).[56] This platform also has the added benefit of functioning as a rather sophisticated map quiz, as students had to plot cities in locations throughout the continent. In addition to this were more standard written assignments that included analysis of an existing narrative digital platform and finally the development of a historical research question and the assembly of an annotated bibliography to use as a basis for their final assignment.

The final assignment was the culmination of these smaller projects and skills and built on the familiarity that students were beginning to develop with "born digital" projects. In this final project, students had to design a historical question based on a theme on city life in Africa. Projects were planned as specifically bounded in space and time, in that they had to be situated in a specific city, and a well-defined temporal period. To develop these projects, students also learned how to use the StoryMaps tools offered by the ESRI platform, such as StoryMaps Tour and Journal, and the Cascade and Spyglass tools. As of 2020, these tools have been combined into a single StoryMap platform. The ESRI applications are more complex and more flexible, so beginning with the KnightLab Suite provided a solid foundation. Student final project portfolios can be seen online at digitalstorytelling.ucr.edu.

The student projects from this course had markedly different outcomes from the same version of the course taught as a research seminar with only the expectation of written papers. There was increased student engagement with the sources, and students reported far more satisfaction with their understanding of the material. Their analysis was much sharpened by having

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[56] Here, they read David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone, "Introduction. Urban Africa: Histories in the Making," in: David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 1–17.

to both narrate and visualize their arguments, and also provide evidence that maintained a through line in their projects. Peer reviews are an integral part of any course I teach, and peer reviews take on a different hue with digital projects. In this case, students had to troubleshoot their digital platforms in progress, and the process of presenting and troubleshooting works-in-progress was a critical part of completing the projects, and fostered an environment where collaboration was a generative process that could still feedback and strengthen individual projects.

## Conclusion

The events in early colonial Lagos demonstrate the effects of an elaborate rewriting of space. For instance, the project of the civilizing mission in West Africa not only targeted people, but also intended to "civilize" space as well, and along with the handful of Europeans, many returnees were "agents of civilization." The immediate effect of diaspora making in Lagos was dramatic, and rich with symbolic capital. A slave market became a church, and slave barracoons were erased, and rewritten as spaces of leisure for Europeans and elite Africans. The "natives" were relegated to the northern edge of the city, and their quarters become "Old Town." Unlike old town which faced the mainland or interior of Africa, the "newer" and "civilized" parts of town were in the south and were oriented towards the Atlantic Ocean. However, merchants and Christian missionaries (who were mostly immigrants) flourished in all areas, creating connections throughout the island.

In the end, it was force and not indigeneity that prevailed in establishing ownership over the entire island, and once they had crushed Dosunmu's initial rebellion, the new administration focused on their task of securing property to ensure that their new colony would prosper, and eventually pay for itself. Both local and foreign alike were absorbed under the jurisdiction of the British, as they demonstrated that their naval power made up for whatever claims they lacked in terms of the right to the island and port. The discourse on improvement itself, plotted both on the ground and at the Colonial Office in London, and based on policies previously implemented in other colonies, masked the utility of existing indigenous urban patterns. In fact, these interventions – the new roads, institutions and infrastructure – not only made more real British influence, but also sharpened the realities of permanent occupation.

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