Making Caribbean History

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Artifact type: Syllabus and sample assignment
Developed for: Lower-level undergraduate class
Audience: History and non-history majors
Time required: 1 class + outside work
Method and tool: Working with historic documents and transcription using optical character recognition

Description:
History (HI) 209 "Making Caribbean History" counts towards the college's general undergraduate requirement that students take three credits of History or Political Science as well as the Global Studies requirement in our new History and Civic Engagement major. I will teach it for the first time in Spring 2020.

HI 209 emphasizes practical, hands-on historical methodology in which students are required to relate the past to the present and prepare primary sources for a general audience. The course requires introducing at least four methods of analyzing primary source documents. In addition to materials from news outlets and scholarly secondary sources, students engage with primary materials from the special collections of the James Ford Bell Library at the University of Minnesota as a springboard for understanding and interpreting the Caribbean. Core readings in original sources come from translated portions of the De Mey van Streefkerk collection of plantation documents from colonial Suriname, selections from the James Stedman Archive and Book Manuscript collection, and selections from the print materials and maps in the Atlantic World collection published at the UMedia archive. In addition, in each semester students read and discuss at least one of the works by authors from the Caribbean or of Caribbean heritage that have received the Anisfield-Wolf Book award.

The course has a digital pedagogy component. In the first semester the class is offered, the two digital technology tools we will be using to analyze the primary sources are Optical Character Recognition and the online mapping tool, ArcGIS's StoryMaps. Optical Character Recognition will be one of two tools we use for transcription. StoryMaps will allow students not only to map the locations in their primary sources but also to provide commentary and relevant audiovisual materials.

Originally I had thought we would use Omeka to provide commentary on primary sources, both because we worked with it during the in-person portion of our NEH Institute on "Textual Data and Digital Texts in the Undergraduate Classroom" (https://dsl.lsu.edu/nehtextualdata/)and because the tool is well-known in local History departments. However, as part of two working groups at Ursuline College , I learned to use StoryMaps. Multiple humanities faculty at Ursuline will be using ArcGIS' StoryMaps in newly developed courses each semester for the next several years. I therefore decided to limit the number of new technologies our Emerging Technologies Specialist and Digital Instruction Technologist will need to support during the initial rollout of HI 209.

The assignment included here is the second of two scaffolded assignments in which students transcribe original 18th-century documents. The earlier assignment is an exercise in transcribing,

analyzing, and explaining a handwritten manuscript. This second assignment uses OCR as a transcription aid in the analysis of an 18th-century printed document.

Supporting materials:
OCR transcription exercise handout

Pamela McVay with technical assistance from Krystina Zeit

This assignment is most easily done from a desktop computer. Except for your own work, do not edit or change any documents in the shared folder for this assignment.

In this assignment we will transcribe part of a pamphlet from the Bell Library's Atlantic World Collection using Optical Character Recognition, or OCR, to begin the process. OCR is a tool that converts images of printed texts and converts them to editable text documents. Like the hand transcription of Stedman's diary we did earlier, this is an early step in preparing an easily *searchable and editable* version of a rare print text document. As with the previous assignment, I will assign each of you two pages to convert. Also as with the previous assignment, we have a system for naming the documents so that they are easy to find.

A. Getting the documents ready to edit (5 points total)

1) Locate your document: (1 point)

We are using a document housed at the University of Minnesota's UMedia Archives in both .jpg and .pdf format. You will be assigned two pages from the document. The full citation and a link to the *persistent url* (a permanent link which is not embedded inside any other web link) are below. You can download the entire .pdf file (6MB) if you wish, or just the two pages you are working from. Just be sure that when you upload materials later you only upload the pages you are working with.

Citation: Bluett, Thomas. *Some memoirs of the life of Job, the son of Solomon the high priest of Boonda in Africa: who was a slave about two years in Maryland, and afterwards being brought to England, was set free, and sent to his native land in the year 1734.* For Richard Ford, at the Angel in the Poultry, over against the Compute (London). 1734.

Persistent url: http://purl.umn.edu/262971

2) Save your .jpg files to our shared Google Docs folder (1 point)

a. Open your Google account. In the folder "Making Caribbean History," open the shared folder, "Memoirs of Job."

b. Create a subfolder with your family name in our shared folder "Memoirs of Job", i.e., "McVay." Place your two .jpg in that folder. **This time you are working alone, so do not edit anyone else's documents in "Memoirs of Job"!**

c. As with the Stedman diary, click on your assigned pages and download a reference copy of each. Title each one "YourFamilyName.Memoirs of Job Page Number" and the appropriate page number, i.e., "McVay.Memoirs of Job 4."

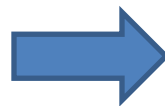 d. Put them in your subfolder of our shared folder, "Memoirs of Job."

3) Use Optical Character Recognition to convert your two .jpg files to plain text. **2 points.** Do this one file at a time. There are many sites that offer this; this one worked for me with minimal aggravation. https://www.onlineocr.net/

a. Avoiding the big green Start buttons, upload your .pdfs one at a time:

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5. Combine the two passages of text you have put through OCR into one file. Upload that file to your subfolder of "Memoirs of Job" using the same method we used before, i.e., "McVay.Memoirs of Job.3 and 4.txt." **1 point.**

B. Editing your Document. 10 Points.

1. Edit (correct) your new .txt document and upload it to "Your Name" in Memories of Job." 5 points.

Your task here is to use the original online document to correct the results of the OCR and create an accurate plain text transcription. I recommend either using a split screen like we did with the Stedman diary or printing out a hard copy of each page. Upload your edited documents as "YourFamilyName.Memoirs of Job page number OCR Fixed.txt", i.e., "McVay.Memoirs of Job 4 OCR Fixed."

C. Write or record a brief response to our two processes of transcription, and upload it to the "OCR Transcription response" dropbox in D2L, not our Google docs. 5 points.

Compared to transcribing a manuscript by hand, what was it like to transcribe print using OCR? How long did each process take you? Which did you prefer, and why?