

Identity, Space, Media, & Mapping Media as Vectors for Mapping Social Identities

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Abstract:

This chapter takes as its starting point a two-gallery photographic and cartographic exhibition in Newport News, VA showing in early 2016. The exhibition itself was the culmination of a yearlong project titled *#WhoAreYouCNU: The CNU Identities Project* that had the aim of engaging the campus community in a broad conversation about any and all facets of individual and group identity. The author, working with four undergraduate research assistants, asked all members of the university community to answer the question – *Who Are You?* – in six words and a photo. Throughout 2015 over 200 people from all areas of the university heeded the call. Many dropped by a mobile recording and photographic studio that we created to record their six-word story and have their photograph taken. Others participated *via* social media, posting their story and their own photograph on the project’s Facebook page. In the first gallery, the Ferguson Center’s Hall Gallery, we featured the stories and large black-and-white portraits of over 40 participants. The second gallery, the Ferguson Center’s Falk Gallery, was a more participatory and multi-media space, featuring an audio installation of participants reading their stories, a display of the photos and stories that participants submitted *via* social media, and a wall where visitors to the gallery can write and post their own six-word stories and photographs. Additionally, a large section inside the Falk Gallery entitled “Emplaced Identities” used printed maps, photographs, a video installation, and an interactive web-mapping display to explore the spatiality of identity.

In this chapter we aim to do three things: First, we will provide an overview of the project and exhibition, including images from both of the gallery spaces we created, and of particular works from the exhibition. Second, we will engage in a detailed discussion and analysis of “Emplaced Identities,” which focused especially on the production and persistence of residential racial segregation the United States generally, and in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia more specifically. Finally, we will bring this project and exhibition into a much broader discussion of the effects of using these media – photography, story-telling, cartography, social media, video, audio – and the overall effect of all of them together in a single gallery space, to engage not only with questions of identity, but also the both subtle and overt ways that identity is fundamentally spatial, and the diverse ways that these media become vectors for mapping identities.