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DESCRIPTION:

This proposed project utilizes Geographic Information Systems technology to make visible the maps existent in Karen Tei Yamashita’s acclaimed multiethnic novel *Tropic of Orange*. In her novel, Yamashita uses the motif of maps and mapping to re-envision the cultural geography of Los Angeles and rethink, by extension, the parameters of American identity. Though the text itself centers on Los Angeles, the novel transgresses boundaries both through its cast of multiethnic and immigrant characters and in its very setting; the first chapter begins “Not too far from Mazatlan,” while the book as a whole ends in a section titled “Pacific Rim” with the chapter “American Express: Mi Casa / Su Casa.” Just as transnationalism attempts to remap theories of globalization by focusing on individual actors, Yamashita’s work reveals a palimpsestic map of L.A. that includes its transnational, ethnicized, and displaced citizenry and calls into question both the theory that borders of the United States are impermeable and its corollary that these borders delineate and encompass a monolithic cultural identity.

Our project extends literary analysis of the novel to include the possibilities of GIS mapping to effect a very real spatial understanding of the cross migrations always already inherent in Los Angeles and the United States at large. Thus, through GIS mapping, we hope to chart new understandings of the complex web of interdependent groups, including the homeless and migrants, that function to sustain L.A. In so doing, the constantly restructuring landscape of L.A. reflected in Yamashita’s work becomes a scientific reality, revealing both the shifting, transnational nature of the citizenry of the U.S. and the ways it might be reimagined.

This project grows out of the mutual interests of both myself and my mentee, John Dees, and draws on inherent links between the humanities and geographic sciences. For my part, examining the trope of mapping has long been a research interest; I presented on the trope of mapping in *Tropic of Orange* at the 2011 Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States Conference in Boca Raton, and I will present “Remapping Chinatown on the Diagonal,” an essay on the trope of mapping in Francis Chung’s poetry at the 2013 MELUS conference. My conference presentations represent a larger interest on mapping among multi-ethnic and transnational circles; however, as Martyn Jessop points out, “the use of spatial information in digital humanities remains very limited” (39). Jessop has found this is largely due to the large learning curve required to utilize GIS technology and recommends that humanities work with GIS could move forward more quickly if collaboration was utilized. John’s coursework with GIS and his interest in different applications of GIS position him as an ideal collaborator on this project. John recently won second place at the Georgia Collegiate Honors Conference for an essay that used GIS to look at the environmental landscape of Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*. For the essay, John analyzed the relationships between agriculture, economy, environment, and human progress in the 1930s Panhandle to argue that the unrestrained capitalist mindset of that time negatively impacted the

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ecosystem presented in Steinbeck’s work. Our partnership will capitalize on both of our strengths; I will provide John with mentoring in literary research and analysis, while he will educate me on the many uses of Geographic Information Systems.

Specifically, we plan to use the spatial mapping capabilities of GIS to plot the journeys of the seven characters who separately narrate the seven chapters of Tropic of Orange. Utilizing GIS allows us to not only visualize the journeys of these characters but also to analyze and structure the relationships between these characters and outside economic, political, social, and environmental forces. Such lines of inquiry are upheld by Yamashita’s text; different characters evince struggles for social justice, environmental parity, and political equity. The promise in mapping a fictional account of Los Angeles lies in unveiling the truths the novel posits about the economic, social, and environmental disparities existent within the city. Reading Yamashita’s work through the lens of GIS mapping makes graphically evident the diverse constituents and actors who daily contribute to the identity, culture, history, and day to day success of Los Angeles, and, by extension, the United States. Thus, GIS fills in the gaps of Yamashita’s imagined text by substantiating the reality of the immigrants and homeless who populate and figure largely into the nation state.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Ultimately, our project brings together the very different fields of American Literature and Geographic Information Systems into a truly innovative and unique cross-disciplinary project that challenges the boundaries of the humanities. While humanities fields routinely draw on maps, landscape, and place to illuminate relationships between geography and culture, few humanities scholars have plumbed the possibilities of using Geographical Information Science to assist in their research. As noted earlier, literary scholars have yet to embrace GIS and its potential to add a graphic representation to both the real and imagined places examined in literature and poetry. However, transnational multiethnic texts like Yamashita’s invite us to map the routes of fictitious characters in order to concretize the reality of immigrant and homeless lives and their relationship to the engine of capitalism and American culture. John’s previous work mapping the dust bowl of Steinbeck’s novel Grapes of Wrath represents one of the first attempts to merge literature and geographical science. Our current project extends and deepens the relationship between text and science by focusing on the very real struggles of these migrants and homeless and the ways understanding the geographic terrain of the text illuminates the relationships between the disparate constituents of Los Angeles. Thus, our culminating project will be one of the first essays presented at a national conference to utilize GIS to read literature. I anticipate reactions to the uniqueness and creativity of this project will further encourage other literary scholars to begin similar research projects.
GOALS AND EXPECTED PRODUCT:

Our final product is an essay for the 2014 national conference of the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature in the United States (MELUS). This group is the largest body of multiethnic literary scholars in the U.S. In addition, we hope the work this summer will also yield a longer first draft of an essay we would like to submit for publication in the award-winning MELUS journal, a peer-reviewed journal published by Oxford University Press. Finally, given the originality, interdisciplinarity, and potential of the project, I am hopeful our collaboration may lead to future work with other multiethnic texts, possibly culminating in a book.

PLAN FOR COLLABORATION:

Our project is indeed a collaboration; I expect to learn as much from John as he learns from me as we enter unchartered territory in this highly interdisciplinary project. Thus, over the eight week period, John and I will meet at least three times a week for extended sessions; in addition, John will keep a log of hours spent in mapping of the project outside of our meetings. As the project is intensely collaborative, I anticipate that later weeks will see us interacting for extended periods on a daily basis as John teaches me about the capabilities of GIS and his findings and I mentor him on constructing a sound literary argument. The research project will fall into roughly four stages: preliminary research and organization, preliminary mapping, remapping and clean-up, and annotation and write up.
BUDGET AND TIMELINE:

Our budgetary needs for this project are very low as the University of North Georgia already offers access to the GIS software we will be using. Thus, our only start-up costs will be $16.00 for a copy of Tropic of Orange for John and a $20.00 copy card for research materials (we plan to take a trip to University of Georgia, home to one of the largest research libraries in Georgia, to do research and gather data). Our budget then is $36.00 total.

The timeline will proceed as follows:

Week One: Perform literature review and research available materials (trip to UGA). John will read the novel. Examine the capabilities of GIS in terms of the novel. Discuss other potential mapping opportunities for the novel.

Week Two: Map the routes of migration and interaction suggested by Yamashita with special attention to freeways and connections to Mexico.

Week Three: Map the characters themselves and the flight of the “magic” orange from Mexico to L.A.

Week Four: Work on writing up the first maps and conference proposal; collaborate on and map other possibilities within the novel.

Week Five: Begin constructing the “grand” multilevel map and continue writing.

Week Six: Clean up map and finish additional layers. Add emphasis/de-emphasis as needed. Begin work on longer essay.

Week Seven: Further research as necessary and continue writing. Additional clean up of maps.

Week Eight: Complete final draft of conference paper and first draft of longer research essay.
IV. Certifications

Faculty certification
I hereby certify that Anastasia Turner will teach no more than 8 course hours during each summer session spanned by the FUSE program. Anastasia Turner is committed to mentoring John Dees on a continual basis during the period of the FUSE program.

Anastasia Turner, Faculty member

Anita Turlington, Chair, English Department

Student certification
I hereby certify that I, John Dees, will commit at least 40 hours per week to the scholarly project described in this application. I also certify that I am not enrolled in more than 4 course hours during each summer session spanned by FUSE. I am aware that failure to comply with these two requirements may result in the forfeiture of my summer stipend.

John Dees, Student