BLACK MARINER DATABASE

Movement of Maritime Fugitives in the 18th Century Atlantic

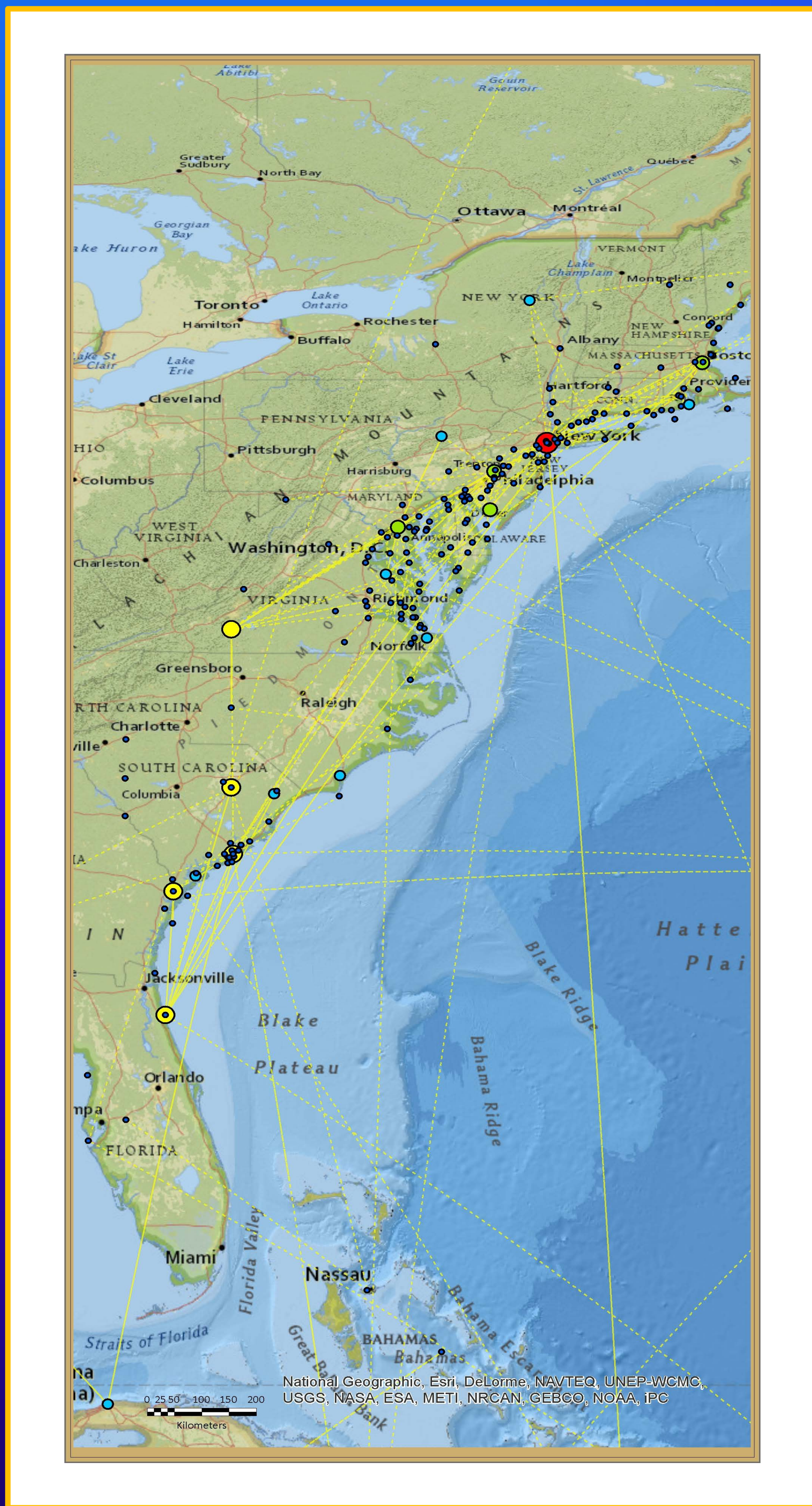Foy, Dr. Charles R. [1]   Di Naso, Steven M. [2]   Allison, Nathan [3]   Ill, Benjamin, A. [3]

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No. Fugitives

0-10   11-29   30-82   83-199   200-380

Fugitive Movement

The Black Mariner Database
An Interdisciplinary GISci Research Project

National Geographic, Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, UNEP-WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, PC

ABSTRACT

The Black Mariner Database, *BMD* comprises more than 22,000 eighteenth century black mariners or maritime fugitives. Records of these seamen have been found in archives and libraries throughout the Atlantic world, although due to the initial research conducted by Dr. Foy being focused on the Anglo-American maritime world, a significant portion of the records are of blacks serving on British and American vessels. The *BMD* contains information about the age, race, marital status, religion, height, physical and personal characteristics, maritime careers, and owners.

In this interdisciplinary collaboration between the History Department and the Geographic Information Sciences Lab (GISci Lab), Department of Geography & Geology, we build a 'turn-key' Geographic Information System for the BMD which enables the automated mapping of black mariners and black mariner fugitives both spatially and temporally. Here we offer a preliminary glimpse into the 'hidden lives' of black mariner fugitives, animating the BMD's aspatial records of mariners' travels across the Atlantic using Esri ArcGIS…

INTRODUCTION

Moving frequently, leading short lives, and owning little property, mariners rarely left footprints. Black mariners, particularly those who sought to escape assorted forms of bondage via the sea, left only scattered remnants of their lives in the historical record. These men often carried forged passes, changed clothes, and in other creative ways concealed their identities. To find freedom, many of them traversed national, ethnic, and religious borders. In short, black mariners' success in obtaining freedom or remaining free depended on being elusive. So how to identify black sailors and detail their lives? The answer to this question is not a simple one. Few blacks in the 18th century were literate. North American vessels of the era were not required to maintain crew lists. And few slave runaways were so foolhardy as to leave evidence indicating their intended destination.

The Black Mariner Database ("BMD") comprises more than 22,000 18th century black mariners or maritime fugitives. Records of these seamen have been found in more than 35 archives and libraries throughout the Atlantic world. The BMD contains 53 separate data fields on each mariner, including information about the age, race, marital status, religion, height, physical and personal characteristics, maritime careers, and owners. It has been described by Jeffrey Bolster, the author of *Black Jacks* as "a great social history tool."

METHOD

To preserve a persistent relationship between Dr. Foy's Black Mariner Database in File Maker Pro, and the BMD File Geodatabase on our server in GEG, a common 'Black Mariner ID' field was created. The BMID field facilitated communication between the two repositories which use different operating systems, and will allow for future ODBC connectivity as needed.

We built a relational database with a custom BMD Geocoding Service unique to 18th century geographic place names. Geographic coordinates for these locations were queried and recorded from the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names TGN. This allowed us to locate most of the ports black mariners fled from, or fled to, and in turn, place points on our map in the appropriate locations thereby converting aspatial BMD records, to spatial components in our BMD Geodatabase. Where BMD records exhibited a valid port fled from and port fled to, we automated the connectivity of these locations using tools we created in our custom Geodatabase.

RESULTS

Using the BMD and our GIS BMD Geocoding Service, we successfully geocoded and subsequently located, the ports that thousands of black mariners' fled from and / or fled to. We enabled attribute domains on fields containing geographic place names such that we could maintain attribute integrity of these data. A work in progress, Dr. Foy's interpretation of these data is pending and our progress on the BMD will continue as BMD records are standardized, geocoded, subsequently mapped, analyzed spatially, and interpreted…

GEODATABASE

Our geodatabase design allows for the creation, editing, management, storage, analyzing, querying, and display of these data in Esri ArcGIS, including ArcGIS Server and associated applications…

GISday   GISci Lab, Geographic Information Science Center, Eastern Illinois University