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Dear Mr. Meredith: Mapping Correspondence Sent to James Meredith During the Integration of the University of Mississippi

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ABSTRACT

On October 1, 1962, James Meredith made history as the first African-American student to be admitted to the then racially segregated University of Mississippi. In the weeks before and after his admission, Meredith received thousands of letters from around the world expressing support or condemnation of his actions. Today, many of these letters are housed at the University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections and have been digitized and made publicly available on eGrove, the University's institutional repository. Motivated to raise awareness of and interest in this important archival collection, the authors designed a spatial humanities project, "Dear Mr. Meredith," that maps the locations from which these letters were sent. By coding the letters based on whether they are "pro" or "anti" integration, the project creates a snapshot of American attitudes about segregation and allows for critical examination of public perception of James Meredith's actions during the height of the civil rights movement. This article will provide a detailed account of the project, including the methodological approach, a thorough analysis of the findings, implications of the mapping project, and next steps for future research using the letters.

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Introduction

James Meredith was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi on June 25, 1933. After graduating from high school in St. Petersburg, Florida in 1951 he served in the U.S. Air Force for nine years, including a three-year stint at the Tackikawa Airforce Base in Japan, before returning home to Mississippi to pursue a college degree. He attended Jackson State College, a historically black university in Jackson, Mississippi from 1960–1961, applying for admission to the University of Mississippi in January of 1961. At that time, the University only admitted white students despite the 1954 United

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States Supreme Court ruling Brown v. Board of Education, which established racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional, even if otherwise "equal." Meredith received a telegram from the University in February of the same year denying his admission. After his response to the telegram went unanswered by the University, he filed a lawsuit in May 1961 with the assistance of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund. The United States Court of Appeals ruled that Meredith should be admitted, a decision that was upheld on September 10, 1962 by the United States Supreme Court after the state of Mississippi appealed the decision.

After the Supreme Court ruling in favor of Meredith, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett assumed the role of Registrar at the University in order to block his admission. This radical action by Governor Barnett forced the involvement of the federal government. A deal was reached on September 30 between the Governor and the U.S. Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, to allow Meredith to be admitted, which resulted in the Ole Miss Riot of 1962. An angry mob fired guns and threw bricks at U.S. Marshals stationed outside the Lyceum, the University's administration building, to ensure Meredith's safety. The attackers were finally subdued with the arrival of federal troops in the early morning hours of October 1st. The rising sun revealed two dead bystanders and hundreds of wounded, including marshals and soldiers. Two hundred protestors were arrested. James Meredith registered for courses later that same day, becoming the first black student to ever do so at the University of Mississippi.

This long and arduous process captured the nation's and the world's attention. As news traveled about what was happening at the University of Mississippi, James Meredith received "more than 1,000 letters, most of them expressions of support" from people of all walks of life. But not all of the letters were supportive. As Meredith reflects, "One guy sent me a piece of singed rope, and another sent a poem, I guess you'd have to call: *Roses are red, violets are blue; I've killed one* [censored][1] *and might as well make it two*" (Meredith 1962). While it is unknown how many letters Meredith received during this time, all of the letters he donated to the University in 1997 have been digitized and made publicly available on eGrove, the University of Mississippi's institutional repository, as part of the Integration of the University of Mississippi digital collection (2019). The collection consists of 1,418 letters, which have been categorized as "pro-" and "anti-" integration based on their sentiment toward Meredith's cause (1,156 and 262 letters, collectively). The letters went through at least two rounds of categorization. First, some were marked "sympathetic" or "unsympathetic" by Meredith as he received them. Second, the letters were sorted into "pro-" and "anti-" categories by the archivist who processed the collection. The archivist has since left the university and did not leave

a record of their decision-making process, so further knowledge of how the letters were categorized is unavailable.

In 2020, the authors launched "Dear Mr. Meredith," a geospatial humanities research project. Since most letters included return addresses and were already qualitatively coded based on sentiment, the authors set out to map all of the letters James Meredith received to reveal for the first time the geographic distribution of the letters based on sentiment. Mapping the letters this way will enable the authors to create a snapshot of general public attitudes toward segregation during an extraordinary period in American history.

In 2022, the University of Mississippi commemorated the diamond anniversary of Meredith's admission with a series of events organized around the theme "The Mission Continues: Building Upon the Legacy" (University of Mississippi 2023). During the 60th anniversary celebrations, the authors presented their initial findings from a pilot project that examined a small sampling of the letters Meredith received. This pilot project was designed to determine the feasibility, identify best practices, and establish workflows for organizing, transcribing, and mapping the letters before applying that methodology to the entire collection.

In the year since first presenting the initial findings of the pilot project, the authors have finished mapping all letters received by Meredith. This paper will outline the process of the mapping project from conception through completion. It will begin with a review of the literature on GIS/mapping as an essential and innovative research tool for the humanities, followed by a detailed account of the methodology and an analysis of the primary findings and implications of the mapping project. It will conclude with next steps and future opportunities for digital scholarship projects using the letters.

Literature Review

The use of geographical information systems (GIS) in humanities research has significantly expanded in recent years. GIS is "a system that creates, manages, analyzes, and maps all types of data" and allows for spatial analysis (Esri 2023). Its application in the digital humanities is known by several names, including geohumanities, spatial humanities, and geospatial humanities (Gieseking 2018; Murrieta-Flores and Martins 2019; Dunn 2017; Andris et al. 2020). These projects, which the authors identify as "geospatial humanities," are visual representations of data and metadata taken from primary source documents. Geospatial humanities supplement traditional scholarship by introducing new perspectives on historical and cultural questions "that previously have been studied outside of an explicitly spatial framework" (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris 2010, viii).

Geospatial humanities offer new avenues of scholarship that help researchers analyze historical data in more complex and quantitative ways.

In addition to offering scholars new perspectives, geospatial humanities increase access to and raise awareness of innovative academic research among the general public. Academic libraries, as interdisciplinary research hubs, "support these [GIS] initiatives by providing traditional access to resources and support services to complement burgeoning new technologies and systems" regardless of discipline or department affiliation (Kallaher and Gamble 2017, 559). Geospatial projects, which are often visual in nature, present large amounts of information in simple, digestible ways. This increases the accessibility and lay understanding of archival collections with large amounts of documents or information, thereby increasing interest in those collections. Digitization and digital humanities allow for more accessible, unmediated ways for the public to engage with and interpret primary sources (Nesbit and Berry 2016; Nieves et al. 2017; Nowatzki 2020). Therefore, geospatial humanities can potentially increase public interaction with and interrogation of archival records – and, by extension, history.

This interrogation of historical perspectives and desire to engage with the public influenced the creation of the "Dear Mr. Meredith" project. The James Meredith Collection is an essential piece of Civil Rights and African American history, and geospatial humanities has already been used to examine that history critically. For instance, "Visualizing Emancipation" uses data to illustrate how the end of slavery in America did not happen in a single moment but rather as thousands of "emancipation events" occurring throughout the country (Nesbit 2014, 427). The project uses "computationally aided work" to reveal an "increasingly sophisticated understanding of the geography of slavery's end," showing how visualizing historical data on a map helps increase scholarly engagement with a topic (Nesbit 2014, 434). Several other projects use GIS data to analyze ways in which societal or municipal factors negatively affected the lives of African Americans (for examples see (Gordon 2023; Nelson, Madron, and Ayers 2023; Sarvis et al. 2020). These projects take complex, detailed data and translate them into accessible, engaging projects that challenge traditional narratives. Digital technologies allow scholars to examine primary sources innovatively, and projects focusing on African-American history can help users interrogate the past from a new and revealing perspective.

While there are many African-American digital humanities projects, no other known projects analyzing correspondence during the American Civil Rights era exist. However, many digital humanities projects examine correspondence and postal history during other periods. For example, "Mapping the Republic of Letters" is a collaborative series of visualizations built from correspondence metadata from some of the most well-known

intellectuals of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries (Findlen, Edelstein, and Coleman 2013). In particular, the "Benjamin Franklin Papers: The London Decades" maps Franklin's correspondence network over the eighteen years he spent in London (Winterer and Arcenas 2023). Winterer and Arcenas discuss the amount of effort that goes into converting historical metadata into GIS-ingestible data, noting years of "careful and copious … transcription" efforts to convert "Franklin's correspondence into … computer-digested dates, correspondents, [and] locations of letters sent and received" (Winterer and Arcenas 2023). "Geography of the Post" maps the United States Postal Service's network in the western part of the country in order to examine "where it spread, how it operated, and its role in shaping the space and place of the region" (Heppler et al. 2023). Finally, the "Visual Correspondence" project seeks to "unveil a rich narrative about people and our past through" mapping the correspondence of 56 individuals, including Albert Einstein, Bess of Hardwick, and Bram Stoker (O'Leary 2023). Letters provide a rich look into peoples' lives, and examining their metadata – from and to whom they were sent, where they were written, and how far an individual's correspondence network reaches – can reveal more about historical events than previously imagined.

The concepts and projects listed above informed the approach taken by the authors while building the "Dear Mr. Meredith" project. As a geospatial humanities project, "Dear Mr. Meredith" aims to offer new perspectives on an archival collection that is widely used and represents a critical shift in the University of Mississippi's history. The authors developed the project as a way to represent digital services the library could provide and make the collection more accessible to the public. This project will also contribute to the realm of digital scholarship that aims to unpack misrepresented narratives and illuminate the continued importance of the Civil Rights Movement and its relationship to modern historical understanding.

Methodology

Inspired by the growing body of geospatial humanities research that supplements and enhances more traditional approaches to research in the humanities, the authors set out to map all of the letters based on location and sentiment, either positive or negative. This research project was designed to answer the following types of questions: Are higher concentrations of pro- or anti-integration letters detectable by region, population density, or other demographic data? Because of the size of the collection, the authors decided to work with a small sampling of letters to determine project feasibility and best practices for mapping the letters before applying the methodology to the entire collection.

In order to initiate this pilot project, preexisting metadata about each letter was compiled and added to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet; any letters without a return address were removed. The remaining letters were then organized into two lists based on positive or negative sentiment. A simple random sampling strategy was utilized to identify a smaller sample size with which to work. Simple random sampling allowed for the random selection of a small segment of the letters from each list, positive or negative. Since each letter had an equal and fair probability of being chosen, the resulting sample size adequately represented the larger collection.

Moreover, a quantitatively more balanced sampling of letters was also desired. Because there are four times as many positive letters as negative letters in the collection, oversampling from the negative letters would be required in order to achieve the desired balance. A target number of 30 randomly selected letters from both lists was established. In order to achieve a smaller, balanced random sampling of letters, each letter was randomly assigned a number using Excel's RANDBETWEEN function, which assigns a random integer number between a specified range of numbers to specified cells, rows, or columns. Next, Google's Random Number Generator, which utilizes a pseudorandom number generator (PRNG) algorithm to quickly generate numbers based on defined parameters, was used to randomly select a number for each list of letters. For example, for the positive list, dividing the total number of positive letters (1,156) by 38 equals 30.4, which is the closest dividable integer number without going below the target integer number of 30. Therefore, the RANDBETWEEN function was used to assign a number between 1 and 38 (formula syntax: =RANDBETWEEN(1,38)). Next, using Google's Random Number Generator with the minimum number set to 1 and the maximum number set to 38, the integer number 4 was randomly generated. The final step involved identifying each positive letter that had been assigned the number 4 by Excel's RANDBETWEEN function, resulting in 30 positive letters being identified for the pilot project. The same process was repeated for the negative letters but because of the lower total number of letters the target numbers were adjusted accordingly. For instance, dividing the total number of positive letters (262) by 8 equals 32.8, which is the closest dividable integer number without going below the target integer number of 30. Therefore, =RANDBETWEEN(1,8) was applied to the list of negative letters and Google's Random Number Generator, with the minimum number set to 1 and the maximum number set to 8, randomly generated the integer number 6, resulting in the 32 negative letters being identified for the pilot project.

With the sample data compiled, the letters' locations were added to an Express Map in ArcGIS StoryMaps, a web-based GIS tool that allows researchers to share their maps in the context of narrative text and other

multimedia content. ArcGIS StoryMaps is an ideal platform for hosting the mapping project because it makes the results of the project easily accessible to a broad audience, which is a commonly shared goal of many digital humanities projects. To increase author privacy, street addresses were removed and only the city and state were used to plot each letter on the map. The location of each letter was marked on the map with an icon color-coded to match the letter's sentiment, green for positive and red for negative.

The completed pilot project confirmed the feasibility and utility of the mapping project as a whole and helped establish best practices and workflow for mapping the entire collection of Meredith letters. The methodology established for the pilot project and described in detail above provided a research framework for the full-scale project. In order to execute the mapping approximately 1,400 letters, the authors opted to use ArcGIS Pro, a full-featured professional desktop GIS application for exploring, visualizing, and analyzing data. Because of both the inflammatory opinions expressed in the anti-integration letters and the possibility that some of the letter writers are still alive, the authors opted to anonymize the geographic data. They did so by only entering city-level data, thus clustering all letters of the same sentiment from the same city together. The data was then geocoded using ArcGIS' Address and Place Layer feature.

Next, in anticipation of preliminary demographic analysis, the authors used Social Explorer, an online demographic research tool, to gather and compile 1960 US Census county shapefiles and demographic data for deeper analysis of the collection as a whole. The shapefiles and demographic data were then added as a layer to the base-map. As for the maps themselves, the authors opted to use equal area projection maps. For the world map (Figure 1), the Equal Earth (world) was used and the USA Contiguous Albers Equal Area Conic was used for the United States maps (Figures 2–6). Plotting the location of each letter and adding these demographic data points allowed for a deeper analysis of letter sentiment, the results of which will be shared in the next section.

Analysis

Data analysis for this project was split into multiple parts. First, the authors looked at the entire collection of letters to begin visualizing holistic perspectives of Meredith's integration attempt. Of the 1,418 letters in the collection, 1,156 were categorized as pro-integration, reflecting Meredith's statement that "most of the letters … have supported me," leaving 262 anti-integration letters (Meredith 1962). Of the total, 176 letters – 107 pro, 69 anti – included no return address and were therefore excluded from geographic analysis. It is interesting to note that letters with no

return address accounted for 9.3% of pro-integration post but 26.3% of anti-integration. Many of these address-less anti-integration letters are particularly virulent, indicating that the authors wished to remain anonymous either to increase the threatening nature of the letter or because they did not want their views publicly traced back to them.[2]

After removing letters with no return address, the authors began analysis on the remaining 1,242 letters. These were sent from 46 countries, with the vast majority of letters – 954 (76.8%) – sent from the United States. Of the 288 letters sent internationally, 287 were pro-integration; the only international anti-integration letter hailed from Toronto, Canada. The international letters span six continents, excluding only Antarctica, emphasizing the global reach and support of Meredith's story. The following map (Figure 1) shows the global distribution of the letters sent to James Meredith.

The overwhelmingly positive response from international writers prompts intriguing questions. For instance, are there letters that are missing from the original collection? Did Meredith receive any more international anti-integration letters and chose not to include them? What did international news sources report on the integration, and were the majority of them supportive of Meredith's actions? While the first two questions may be unanswerable, future research could analyze news coverage of the integration and other factors that might have influenced international sentiment.

The second portion of the data analysis focused on letters from the United States, including both pro- and anti-integration letters. In total, 954 letters were sent from the United States, 76.4% of the letters included in this project. Of those, 762 (79.9%) were pro-integration, with the remaining 192 (20.1%) categorized as anti-integration. The following map (Figure 2) shows each state's total distribution of letters. Note that letters were not received from Idaho and Wyoming.

Part of the investigation questioned whether the geographic distribution of positive and negative letters aligned with – or pushed against – common notions of race relations in the United States. Binary rhetoric highlights the southern United States ("the South") as "a place that is backward and particularly racist and violent" when compared to the rest of the country (*Race in the U.S.: Is the South More Racist than the North?* 2022). There is a "palpability to the history of race and racial violence and slavery in the South" that causes it to be labeled as the root of racism within the United States (*Race in the U.S.*). However, the authors wanted to uncover the complexities of the correspondence to see whether it revealed surprising – or expected – information about where and whom pro- and anti-integration letters came from. Would there be a higher concentration of anti-integration correspondence in the South? Is the anti-integration correspondence distributed evenly across the United States? Does an

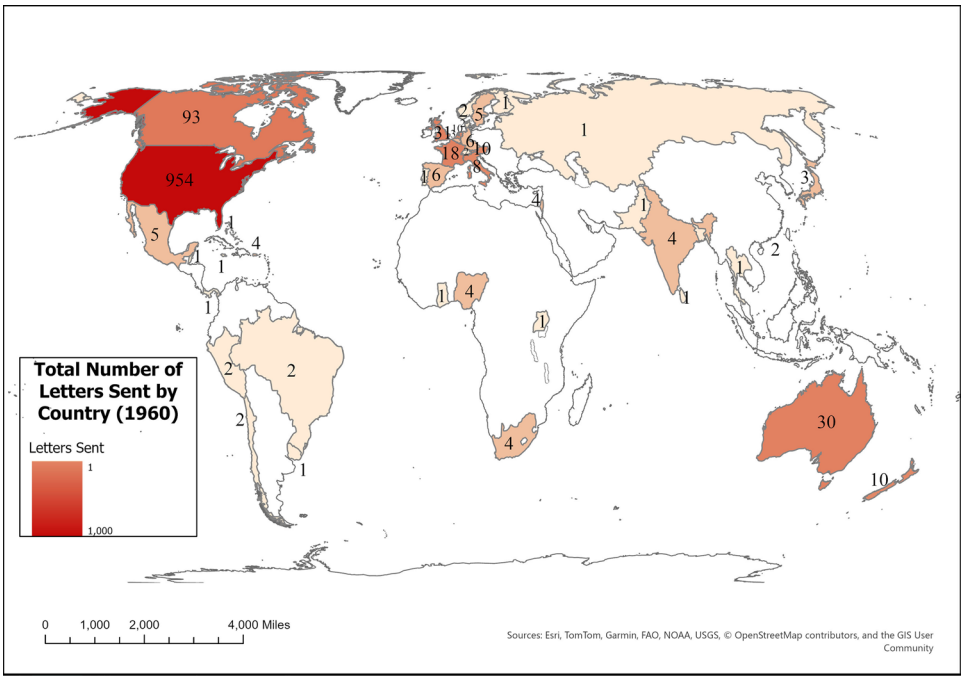

Figure 1. 1960 world map depicting the origins of all letters sent to James Meredith.

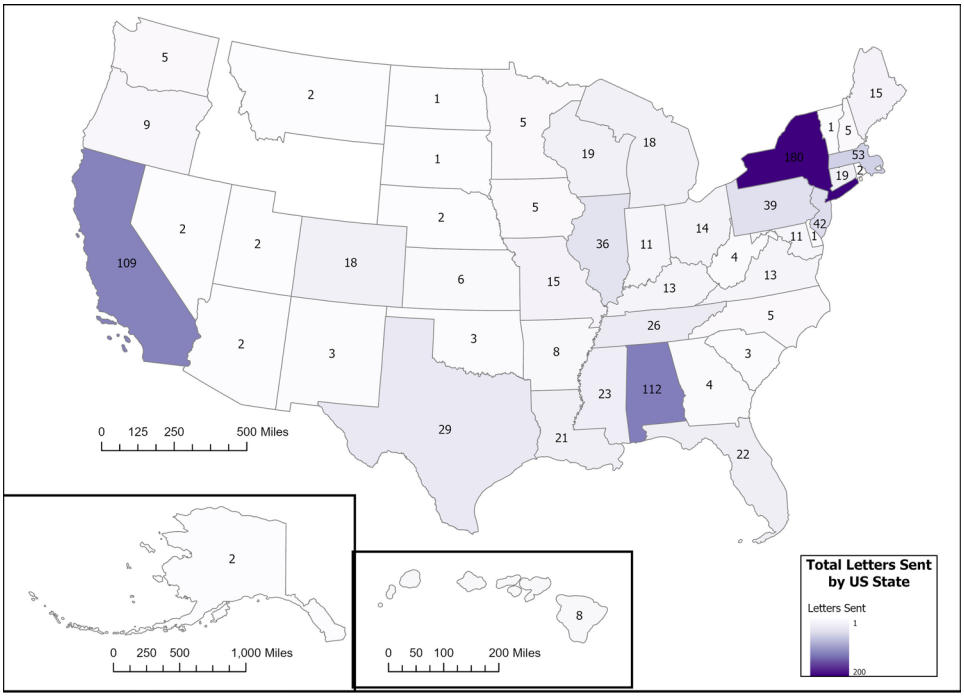

Figure 2. Map of the United States depicting the origins of all letters sent to James Meredith by US state.

individual's race, political leanings, or location in an urban or rural area predict the opinions expressed in their letter?

The letters were first analyzed based on their regional distribution to answer these questions. Based on the US Census Bureau's guidelines, the United States can be divided into four US regions: the Northeast, South, North Central[3] (now Midwest), and West. The following maps show the distribution of letters received by region: Figure 3 for positive and Figure 4 for negative letters.

Furthermore, the proportional distribution of letters across each region is an essential analytical consideration. The following table highlights the total letters from each region (with the percentage of total letters received from the United States in parentheses) along with the number of pro and anti-letters received per region (with the percentages in parentheses in these two columns representing the percent of the total letters received from that region).

Region	Total letters	Pro-letters	Anti-letters
Northeast	341 (35.74%)	307 (90.03%)	34 (9.97%)
Southeast	282 (29.56%)	193 (68.44%)	89 (31.56%)
Midwest	136 (14.26%)	106 (77.94%)	30 (22.06%)
West	195 (20.44%)	156 (80.00%)	39 (20.00%)

The regional sentiment of this sample dataset suggests that letter writers from the South *were* the most likely to oppose Meredith's actions, with 31.56% of the region's letters categorized as anti-integration. Mississippi lies in the heart of this region, and one could argue that the Southern citizens were most affected by the events surrounding the integration and its ultimate results. The letters express conflicting opinions, and their contents begin to reveal that one's sentiments toward Meredith cannot be predicted by region alone. One telegram assures Meredith "that no decent citizen of the South … blames you for this" (Newton and Newton n.d.) while another admonishes him, stating "the negro has … the north part of the United States … so why don't the negro that don't like the ways of the South, go there and let us alone here in the South" (Joyce 1962). The South had the second-largest percentage of letters sent, and the most conflicting opinions, which exemplifies the diversity and complexity of those closest to the situation.

Within these more extensive analyses lie discrepancies that lead to interesting observations. For instance, there are 91 pro-integration letters sent from Birmingham, Alabama, which lies in the South region. This accounts for over 47% of the total pro-integration letters from that region and 12% of the total pro-integration letters. This anomaly leads to the question: was there a write-in or other group effort made to write to

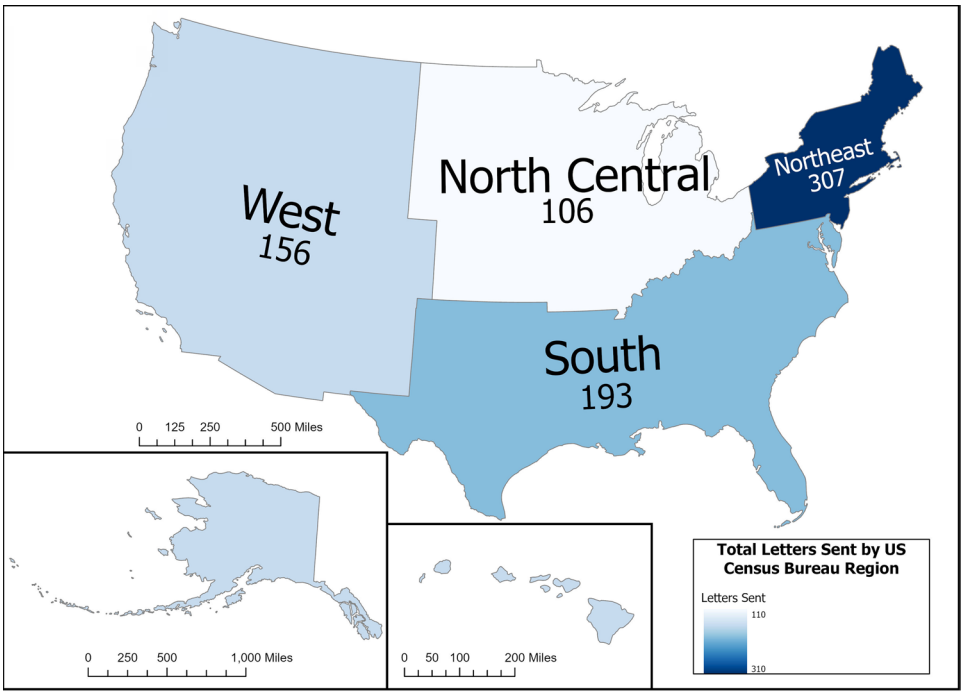

Figure 3. Map of the United States depicting the origins of positive letters sent to James Meredith by US census region.

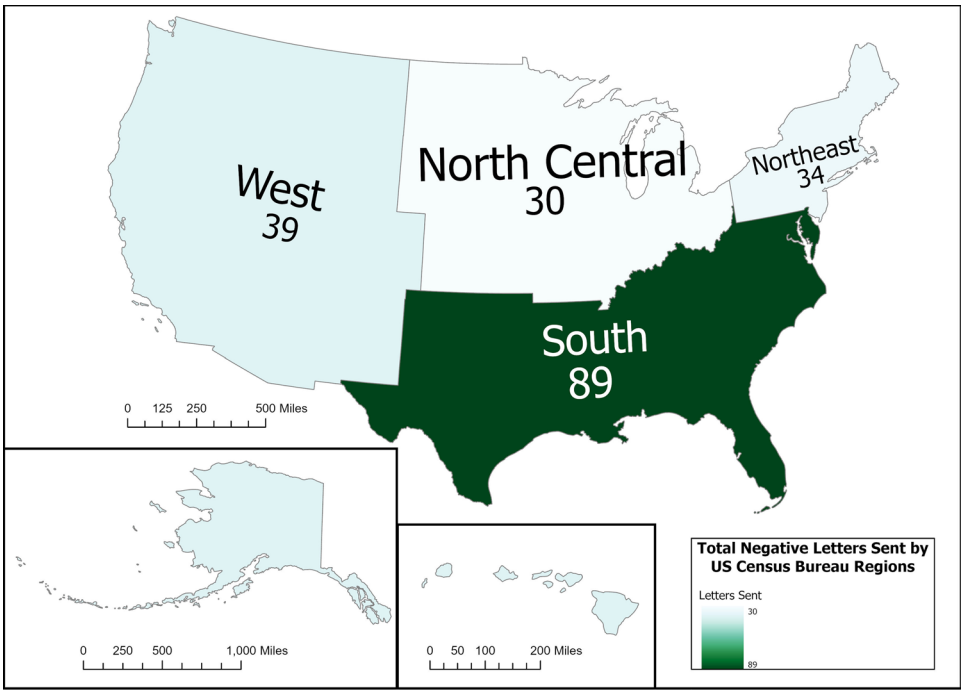

Figure 4. Map of the United States depicting the origins of negative letters sent to James Meredith by US census region.

Mr. Meredith? Did the letter writers know each other or share any commonalities? 1960s Birmingham was one of the most segregated cities in America. It was also marred by racially-based violence, such as the 50 unsolved racially motivated bombings in the city between 1945 and 1960. As a result of this long history of segregation and violence, the Black population in Birmingham was well-organized and adept at combatting racial discrimination by the time Meredith sought admission to the University of Mississippi in 1962. This history may help explain why so many letters of support arrived from such a racially charged city, but more research is needed to confirm.

Conversely, California sent the largest number of anti-integration letters (20 letters, or 10.5% of anti-letters). This is unusual because California lies in the West, with the second-highest percentage of pro-integration letters (81.65%). However, when adjusted proportionally, California proves to follow predicted trends, with pro-integration letters accounting for 78% (89) of total letters sent from the state and the aforementioned 20 letters accounting for 22%. Another major factor worth considering is that California was the second most populated state in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau 1961) and 17 of the anti-integration letters came from the states most populous cities, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco, respectively[4]. This analysis shows how population density plays just as important a role as geographical region in predicting an individual's sentiments toward James Meredith's actions.

Given this, the authors wanted to investigate whether the urban-rural political divide was reflected in the letters. This divide is based on evidence that urban areas trend more liberal and rural areas trend more conservative, which led the authors to question whether one area was more likely to support Meredith's actions than the other (Gimpel et al. 2020). 615 (64.5%) of the letters came from urbanized areas, defined as cities with a population of over 50,000 in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau 1960). Of these letters, 493 (80%) were pro-integration and 122 (20%) were anti-integration. Similarly, of the 339 (35.5%) letters that came from smaller cities or rural areas, 269 (80%) were pro-integration and 70 (20%) were anti-integration. Given that the pro/anti divide is also 80%/20%, an individual's urban or rural setting had a minor influence on whether they were pro- or anti-integration. As with many of the binaries represented in this project, the issue is much more complicated than "rural" or "urban."

While the above shows that region and population correlated to sentiments expressed in a letter, the same cannot be said for individual demographics. In the letters, demographic information is voluntary and self-identified, and not every letter contains explicit identifying information. The demographic information gleaned from the letters includes information

on race, political affiliation, age, gender, and religion or spirituality. Examples of how an individual self-identifies in a letter include:

- Age, gender, race: "I am a 15 year old girl. I am white." (Reid 1962)
- Race, birthplace, religion: "I …am white skinned and born in the middle west … I am aChristian." (Unknown Author 1962a)
- Race, age, religion [implied], gender: "I am white – aged 28. God bless you. Very sincerely, Mrs. Myers" (Myers 1962)

In this paper, only observations on race and political affiliation are included because of their frequent mentions and direct relevance to the subject matter. However, analysis of other demographics is planned for future research.[5]

For letters in which individuals do volunteer race or political leanings, analysis shows that these characteristics do not automatically predict their letter's sentiment. For instance, one telegram from a couple in Nashville, Tennessee reads:

> "We wish to applaud your atitude [sic] courage and restraint and we hope that you will find it possible to stick this difficult situation out we ourselves are concervative [sic] white southerners and we wish to assure you that no decent citizen of the south or the nation blames you for this."(Newton and Newton n.d.)

Conversely, a letter from Minneapolis, Minnesota states:

> "I have always believed myself to be a 'Yankee liberal' but now I'm beginning to wonder! Even a liberal can be revolted by the sight of one person whose ego permits his cause to become a national emergency!" (Cartur[jlt] 1962)

Moreover, a letter from Fort Worth, Texas reads:

> "I will start off by saying I'm a negro. I have been reading about what a crazie [crazy] negro you are. why have you let the NAACP get you in to [into] all this trouble … You are building a wall of hate between the two Races…" (Henderson n.d.)

While the authors do not intend to write revisionist history or sweeping statements, the contrast between these letters shows the nuance of the situation and the diversity of opinions across the country. They also highlight how preconceived notions of who did and did not support Meredith are not always accurate and that one's race or political leaning did not automatically determine individual opinions.

The below density map (Figure 5) shows the 1960 US Census percent of the Black population by county overlayed with the Meredith letters, with color representing sentiment (yellow for positive; black for negative) and size representing the number of letters from a city. The map illustrates

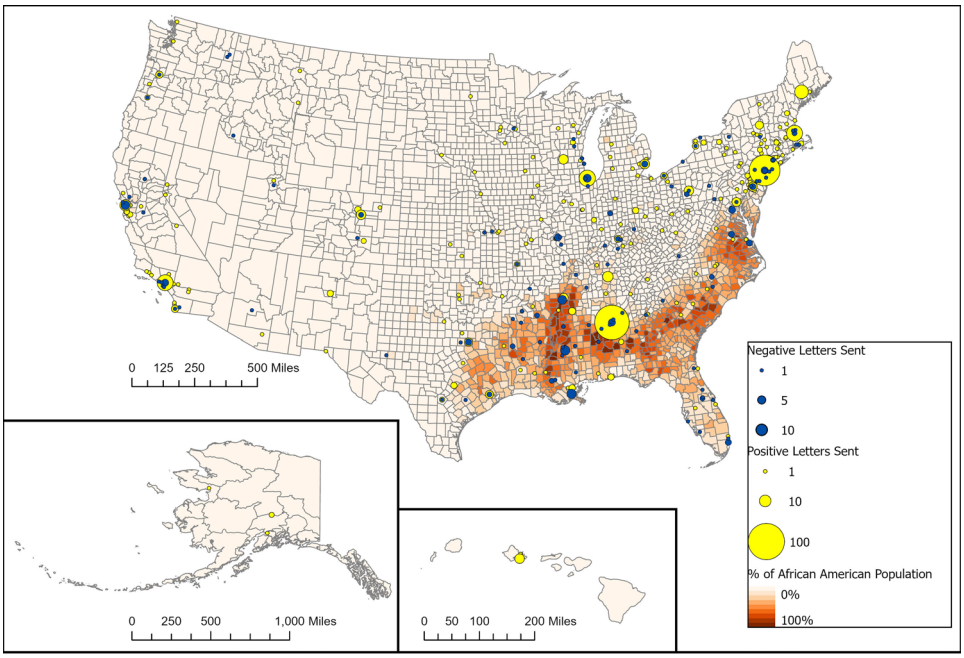

Figure 5. Map of the United States depicting African American population density by US county (1960) overlayed with weighted circles notating the sentiment (color) and volume of letters (size) sent to James Meredith from towns and cities in the United States.

how population demographics such as race cannot be relied upon to predict letter sentiment.

Likewise, the below density map (Figure 6) shows the 1960 US Presidential Election returns, broken down into the two major US Political parties, with red representing the Republican Party and blue representing the Democratic Party. The darker the color, the higher the percentage of votes cast for the respective party.

Contrary to what modern readers might expect, the map shows a large concentration of Democratic votes in the Deep South. While the current Republican and Democratic parties are respectively associated with "conservative" and "liberal" platforms, the Southern Democrats of 1960 had a long history of supporting racial discrimination and segregation. This was the last election before the Democrat-sponsored Civil Rights Act of 1964 pushed conservative, white Southern voters to the Republican party (Baugh 2024). Modern American readers should be cautious of associating Republican/red counties as conservative-leaning and Democratic/blue counties as liberal-leaning in the context of this map. Interestingly, most of the letter-writers who included political leanings in their letters did not explicitly identify themselves with a political party. Rather, they identified as "liberal" or "conservative," often placing these beliefs in contrast with their support or opposition to Meredith's integration (see page 17,

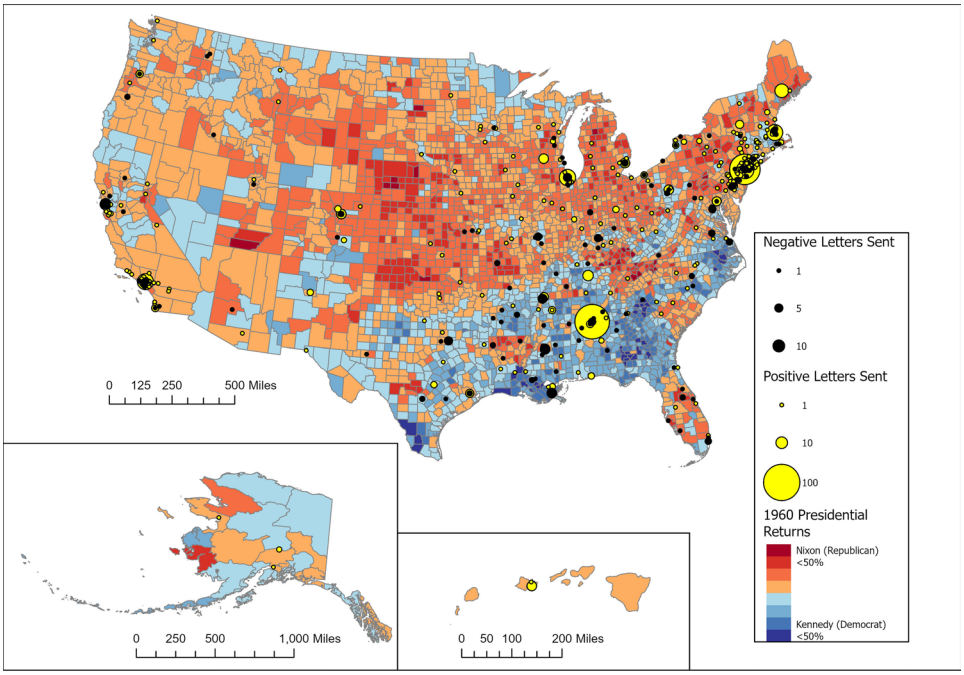

Figure 6. 1960 United States presidential election results by county overlayed with weighted circles notating the sentiment (yellow) and volume (circle size) of letters sent to James Merdith from towns and cities across the US.

Newton and Newton n.d. and Cartur[jlt] 1962). This map and these sentiments illustrate how, like race, political ideology is an unreliable predictor of letter sentiment.

The authors' second approach was to perform basic sentiment analysis on the letters. As discussed above, letters from the collection were divided into pro- and anti-integration groups based on Meredith's own categorization and at the discretion of the archivists processing the collection. However, much like geographic analysis of the correspondence, this analysis reveals that attitudes were far more complicated than someone being "pro" or "anti" integration. Rather, the letters display a wide range of sentiments. Some were overwhelmingly in support of Meredith's cause, offering words of support and encouragement:

> "But please believe me, many, many people care about you … and are behind you fully in your courageous plans … [Listen] to the millions of voices that praise you for your part in opening yet another door for your people.
>
> "When we teach children what means to be an American, we will point to you with pride." (Shelton n.d.)

Conversely, some are virulently and undeniably racist in nature, such as this example from St. Louis, Missouri:

> "You black [censored][6] s—of – a—why don't you get your ass out of the University & go where they are all black." (Unknown Author 1962b)

However, the most intriguing examples come from those who take the most neutral standpoints. In the initial data set, there are several examples of letter writers questioning why Meredith feels the need to "cause the Mississippi people so much trouble" when "there are lots of other school[s] where colored people are welcome" (Sanders 1962). Others use religion to justify segregation:

> "Our Lord God … made every little creature with a knowledge and desire to associate and mate with their kind … This shows that He wants every race to be pure and separate [separate] … I feel that He could certainly use you teaching your people and all others to be seperated [separated] & keep their race pure for this is the Will of God." (Unknown Author 1962a)

Opportunities for Future Research

To be sure, attitudes toward Meredith's integration of the University of Mississippi did not fall into a simple "pro" or "anti" binary. Instead, they were complicated – and more than that, human. The more complex reality of letter sentiment was first revealed during the project's pilot phase and later confirmed once all of the letters were mapped. As a result of the discovery of a far wider range of sentiment in the letters, the authors determined that the immediate next step for the project should be performing algorithmic sentiment analysis. This approach computationally identifies the emotional tone in a text, providing opportunity to interrogate further the binary of letters being either "pro" and "anti" integration. This more advanced analysis will allow the authors to identify more nuanced emotional expressions presented by the letter creators. Similarly, pinpointing additional demographic data from the letters – such as an individual's age, gender, or occupation – will allow for further contextualization and analysis. In addition, further depth will be added to the digital map by adding transcriptions and links to each digitized letter on eGrove. Further contextualization will help elevate the letters from words on paper to historical artifacts capturing a pivotal, emotional, and controversial moment in American history.

Several other research opportunities have been identified by the authors. For instance, future researchers should consider analyzing how local news outlets covered James Meredith and the struggle to integrate the University of Mississippi. Using Birmingham, Alabama, as an example, such an approach may shed more light on why so many positive letters (91 in total) were sent from that location. Furthermore, when the complete records of the1960 US Census are released in April 2032, future researchers

should also consider adding additional analytical parameters such as gender, income and education levels, and any other available variables that may reveal patterns that help explain why some writers were sympathetic to Meredith's cause, and others were not.

Conclusion

James Meredith's bravery and determination changed the course of American history, and his legacy continues to influence the University and state of Mississippi today. Mapping the letters he received while attempting to gain admission to the University of Mississippi contributes to that legacy and adds to the larger body of scholarship about a pivotal moment in American history. This mapping project increases accessibility and raises awareness about these letters, which are an understudied and underutilized yet a critical piece of that history. Additionally, transcribing each letter will open new avenues for scholarly inquiry about American attitudes about integration during the 1960s utilizing digital scholarship methods and tools.

Notes

1. The original language that appears in this quotation depicts prejudices that the University of Mississippi does not condone. The authors chose to censor this language to mitigate this letter's harmful and violent nature in a present-day context.
2. For information on future plans to conduct in-depth sentiment analysis on all of the Meredith letters, please see the section "Opportunities for Future Research.".
3. Prior to 1984, the region now known as the Midwest was called "North Central" by the United States Census Bureau. The remainder of this paper will refer to the region by its modern label, the Midwest. (U.S. Census Bureau 2021).
4. The 3rd, 12th, and 18th most populous cities in the U.S. in 1960.
5. See "Opportunities for Future Research.".
6. The original language that appears in this letter depicts prejudices that the University of Mississippi does not condone. The authors chose to censor this language to mitigate this letter's harmful and violent nature in a present-day context. The original letter in its complete form may be viewed on eGrove, where the content is presented as a historical document to aid in understanding American history and the history of the University of Mississippi. The University Creed speaks to our current deeply held values, and the availability of this content should not be taken as an endorsement of previous attitudes or behavior. All censors marked with dashes were written by the author of the original letter.

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