

An “Atlas in a Day” Design Challenge: Co-creating a Historical Atlas of Racial Violence in the UW Cartography Lab

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Abstract:

Inspired by Guerrilla Cartography’s approach to atlas creation (Cowart and Jensen, 2023), the 10th annual Design Challenge at the University of Wisconsin Cartography Lab (UW Cart Lab) brought together students, staff, and faculty to explore and visualize the theme of historical race riot incidents in the United States from the perspective of African American newspapers. The Design Challenge is an annual, day-long mapping workshop organized by the UW Cart Lab that brings together Cartography and Geography students around a curated mapping theme, often in collaboration with campus or community partners (Moore et al. 2017, Bley et al. 2022). Over the last 10 years, participants and partners for this event have creatively explored a variety themes, including *Visualizing the Evolution of the Great Plains*, *Transforming Justice in Milwaukee*, *Feminist Cartographies and Recidivism*, and *Mapping the Transnational Hazardous Waste Trade*, among other topics (Roth, 2024).

The 10th annual Design Challenge took place on February 17, 2024 and partnered with Geography PhD student Kela Caldwell on her dissertation project to decipher and historicize the term “race riot.” Participants were asked to explore archival records of U.S. “race riot” incidents from African American newspapers between 1889 and 1945, then think through ways of visualizing these historical events in a counter-narrative (Fig. 1). Inspired by Guerrilla Cartography’s Atlas in a Day challenges (<https://www.guerrillacartography.org/atlas-in-a-day>), the UW Cart Lab’s 2024 Design Challenge was a full day of archival discovery and creative production culminating in a collaborative atlas of maps on this theme.



Figure 1. A map of *Mentioned Locations of Race Riots and Bombings from 1883-1989*, made by Gareth Baldrice-Franklin, was used to introduce the topic to Design Challenge participants with data compiled from African American newspapers. At the start of the challenge, participants chose the themes and locations they would map by placing a sticky note on this map projected on the wall.

The day’s goal was to create a collaborative atlas of maps that, according to Kela Caldwell, “gives participants the chance to explore mapping techniques, consider critical storytelling approaches by putting maps in relation to other maps, in addition to discovering hidden data and statistics through archival research materials to promote public engagement and awareness.” Organizers compiled archival data ahead of the event and engaged participants in an atlas compiling activity inspired by Guerrilla Cartography’s process of crowdsourced atlas production (Fig. 2). By the end of the day, participants

produced a mini-atlas with thematic chapters on “Headlining Violence,” “Systems in Place,” and “Narratives,” and were able to go home with a print of the atlas they helped create in a single day (Fig. 3). In this presentation, we discuss the organization of the Design Challenge, the Atlas in a Day process, and key lessons learned from the day.



Figure 2. Participants discuss ideas, themes, and narrative configuration of the atlas.



Figure 3. Mosaic image of maps and pages from the atlas created during the Design Challenge.

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