Cartography, Territory, and Identity

Undergraduate Seminar
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Wednesdays 1:30–3:20pm

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*A world map by Buckminster Fuller from 1944, designed to be respliced and reoriented to show a variety of global geographic relationships.*

Description
Our modern territorial assumptions influence nearly every part of our life. They justify state-sponsored war and restrictions on immigration, and they determine an individual’s chances for receiving reliable health care or attending quality schools. They even shape our own identities, from feelings of neighborhood pride to nationality and race. This course uses cartography – especially scientific cartography and its competitors – as a lens for analyzing modern territory and sovereignty. Maps help focus our attention on a number of related problems. How is territory claimed? Why do we trust maps, and should we ever regard them as “objective”? Are nations the cause or the result of the modern nation state? How do ideas about measuring and representing geographic space influence encounters between different cultures?

We will begin by thinking about how maps can be understood as instruments of power. The bulk of the course then explores how questions of territory and identity have aligned with new ways of producing, using, or challenging maps. The first half of the course looks at the relationship between maps and territorial states: the creation of boundaries, the invention of nationalism, and the tensions of internationalism and globalization. In the second half of the course we will then turn to other types of territories, other traditions of mapping, and the various ways that the scientific map has been contested.

Assignments
Every student is expected to come to class prepared to discuss all the assigned readings, and you will be required to participate in discussion. Participating in discussion isn’t just a fun thing to do, it’s also an important skill that everyone needs to learn.

The night before each class, you will also need to email analytic questions to me about the week’s readings. These emails need not be longer than a short paragraph, but they should ask interesting questions that engage with themes and arguments, not just factual material. We
will discuss how these emails should be written throughout the semester, and questions will be shared anonymously with the group.

There are three assignments due during the semester.

1: Map analysis – due February 11th; 1500–2000 words (5–8 pages). For this paper, you will pick one map and write a short, focused paper presenting and analyzing its argument. You can pick any map from any time period, culture, genre, or subject. It can be a map from medieval Italy, from a 1920s road atlas, from a video game – anything. (Some maps, however, will be easier to analyze than others.) What makes the map scientific, objective, or trustworthy? What arguments does it make about territory, sovereignty, nationality, or identity? Does it give an indication of who should use the map? Your analysis should derive primarily from visual analysis of the map itself, although some brief discussion of its historical context may also be helpful.

2: Map redesign – due March 4th. Using the map you analyzed in your short paper as a starting point, create a new map of the same area with a different argument. For example, if you concluded that a map from World War II showed Germany as a unified nation under attack from hostile outside forces, you could redraw the map to show a different kind of Germany. To make the map, you can use any methods at your disposal: construction paper and markers, Photoshop, Google Earth, xerox collage, GIS, etc. I’ll be happy to help with any technical questions, but it is up to you to acquire any skills you think you’ll need. Include a one-page explanation of your goals.

3: Final research paper – due April 30th; 4000–6000 words (15–20 pages). Topic of your choice. This can be a continuation of your earlier analysis, or you can start fresh with a new subject. The goal will be to analyze a mapping system rather than just a single map; in addition to visual analysis, you will want to address questions of cultural context, production, use, and impact. Example topics might include U.S. census atlases, protest maps of the Vietnam War, the first maps of Ethiopia, etc.

These assignments will combine into your final grade:

Weekly emails 15%
Class participation 15%
Map analysis 15%
Map redesign 15%
Final paper 40%
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Books marked with an asterisk (*) will be placed on reserve, but should be purchased if possible. Books marked with a dagger (†) are available as e-books through Orbis. All other readings will be available on the website.

January 14: Introduction

PART I: CARTOGRAPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL STATES

January 21: Cartography and Power

January 28: Boundaries
* Peter Sahlins, Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), introduction, chapters 1, 2, conclusion, and epilogue.
* D. Graham Burnett, Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado (2000), introduction, chapter 6, and conclusion.

February 4: Nations and Nationalism

February 11: Propaganda
MAP ANALYSIS DUE
February 18: Placing the United States in the World

February 25: From Colonial to Post-Colonial
† Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), introduction, chapters 1, 2, and conclusion.

March 4: Territory and Globalization
– MAP REDESIGN DUE –

– SPRING BREAK –

PART II: MAPPING OTHER SPACES / MAPPING SPACES OTHERWISE

March 25: Cartography in East Asia

April 1: Mapping Sacred Geographies

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April 8: American Indians and European Conquest

April 15: Statistical Mapping and the Politics of Visibility

April 22: Counter-Cartographies and Indigenous Rights

– RESEARCH PAPERS DUE APRIL 30th –
SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

January 14:  Introduction
January 21:  Map Library – meet in Sterling Library, room 707
January 28:  Finding and Manipulating Digital Maps

February 4:  Five-minute Map Presentations (half the class)
February 11:  Five-minute Map Presentations (the other half of the class)
  – MAP ANALYSIS DUE –

February 18:  Nine-minute Redesign Presentations (five students)
February 25:  Nine-minute Redesign Presentations (five students)
March 4:  Nine-minute Redesign Presentations (five students)
  – MAP REDESIGNS DUE –

  – SPRING BREAK –

March 25:  Fifteen-minute Research Workshoping (three students)
April 1:  Fifteen-minute Research Workshoping (three students)
April 8:  Fifteen-minute Research Workshoping (three students)
April 15:  Fifteen-minute Research Workshoping (three students)
April 22:  Fifteen-minute Research Workshoping (three students)
  – RESEARCH PAPERS DUE APRIL 30th –