

Creating Inclusive History and Geography From Our Cars:

Developing Nashville Sites Driving Tours of Nashville's African American History

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Abstract

Nashville Sites is a local nonprofit that creates digital, self-guided, credibly curated historic walking tours of Nashville, Tennessee. After creating nearly thirty walking tours, members of the core team began to consider the benefits of changing the means of taking tours in order to capture alternative narratives of the city's history. By working with local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and scholars of Nashville's African American history, we developed two driving tours that aim to capture the diverse and, at times, difficult history of Nashville. The two tours are of Historic Jefferson Street, the main throughfare and cultural center of the North Nashville community until it was severed by Interstate 40 in the 1960s, and the Nashville Civil Rights Movement. By changing the means of taking the tours, these histories are preserved, shared, and spatially reinterpreted for a public audience.

Research Question

How can technology serve as a tool to make public history more accessible, more inclusive, and expand the local historical narrative?

Nashville Sites

Free to users
 Ad-Free
 Curated by scholars and local experts
 Written and audio narratives
 Option to take virtually

Process

- 1) Team identifies possible stops and lists sites for inclusion in tour based on historical significance
- 2) Create preliminary map and first draft of driving route in Google Maps (see image 2)
- 3) Test drive first route (images 3 and 4); based on findings, narrow stops/create sub-stops based on proximity (image 6)
- 4) Complete research for tour narrative using traditional historical methods (archival and secondary source research, oral histories)
- 5) Test drive route with complete narrative; add finalized directions to the narrative and build a Map Box map
- 6) Identify community member for audio narration and record narration in studio
- 7) Audio editing
- 8) Build tour on website (work with web developers Fog Haus)
- 9) Share via social media and community partners!

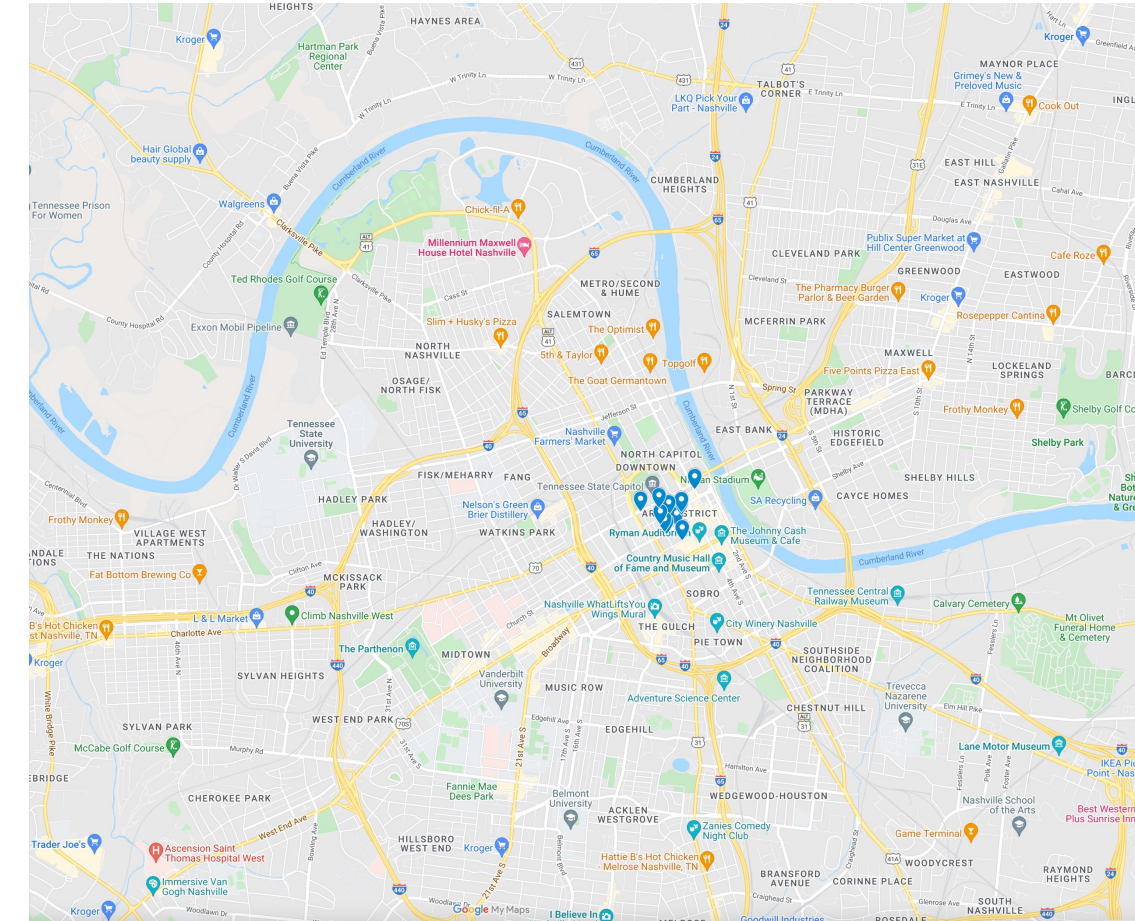


Image 1: Map of points included on the Nashville Sites Downtown Sit-Ins tour (included points are teal)

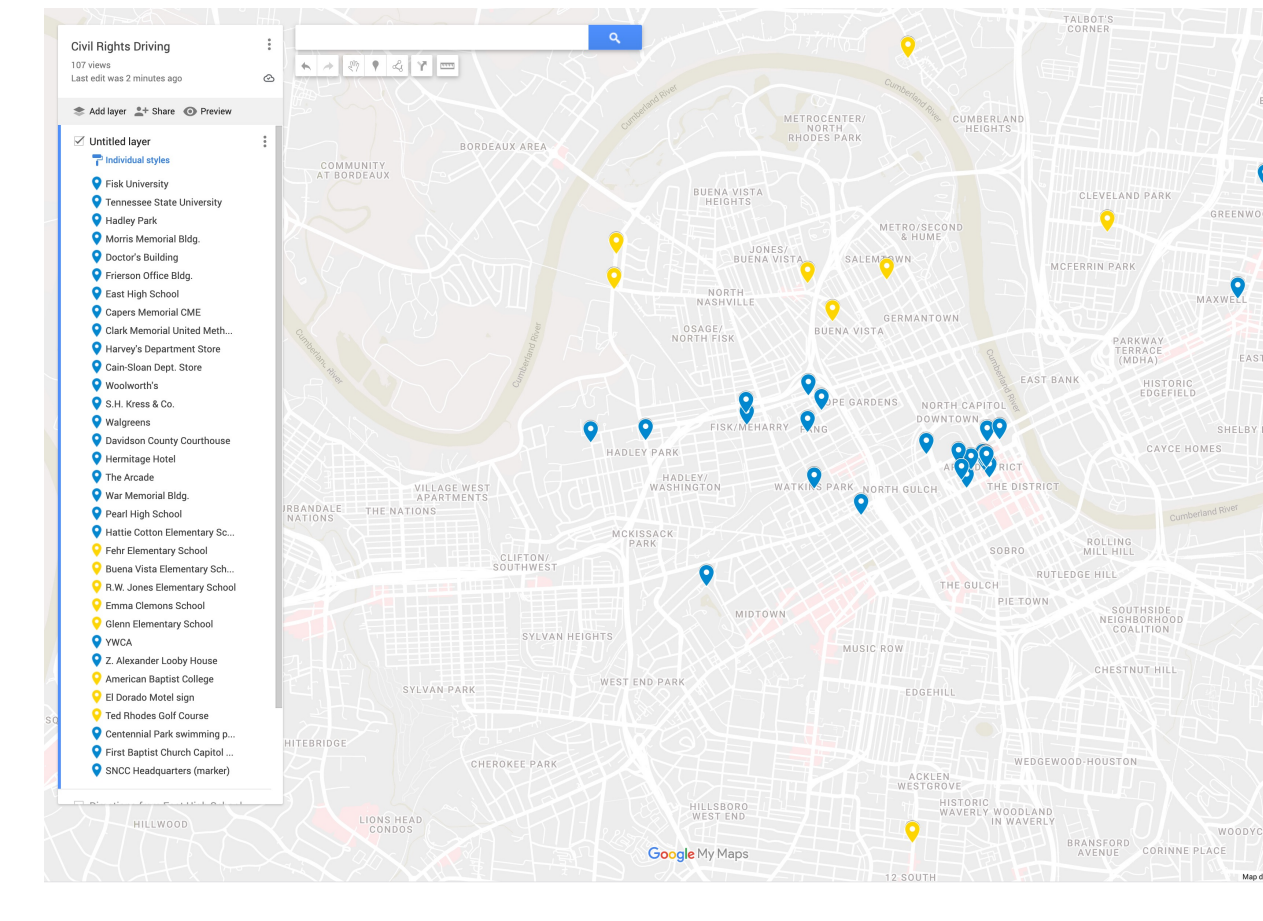


Image 2: Map of points initially proposed for Nashville Sites Civil Rights Driving tour



Image 3: Members of driving tours team during first test drive to determine possible stopping points for tour in summer 2021 (Clark Memorial Chapel); From L to R: Dr. Williams, Dr. Owens, Professor Wynn, Reeves, Whitman



Image 4: Members of driving tours team during first test drive to determine possible stopping points for tour in summer 2021 (First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill); From L to R: Reeves, Professor Wynn, Dr. Williams, Whitman, Dr. Owens

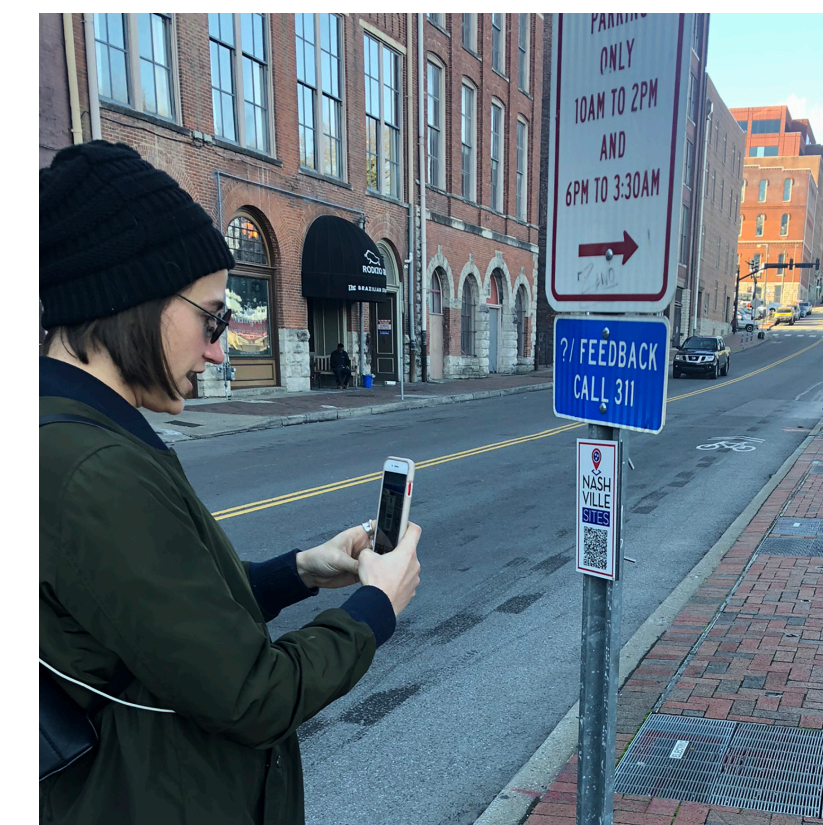


Image 5: Testing QR codes in downtown Nashville

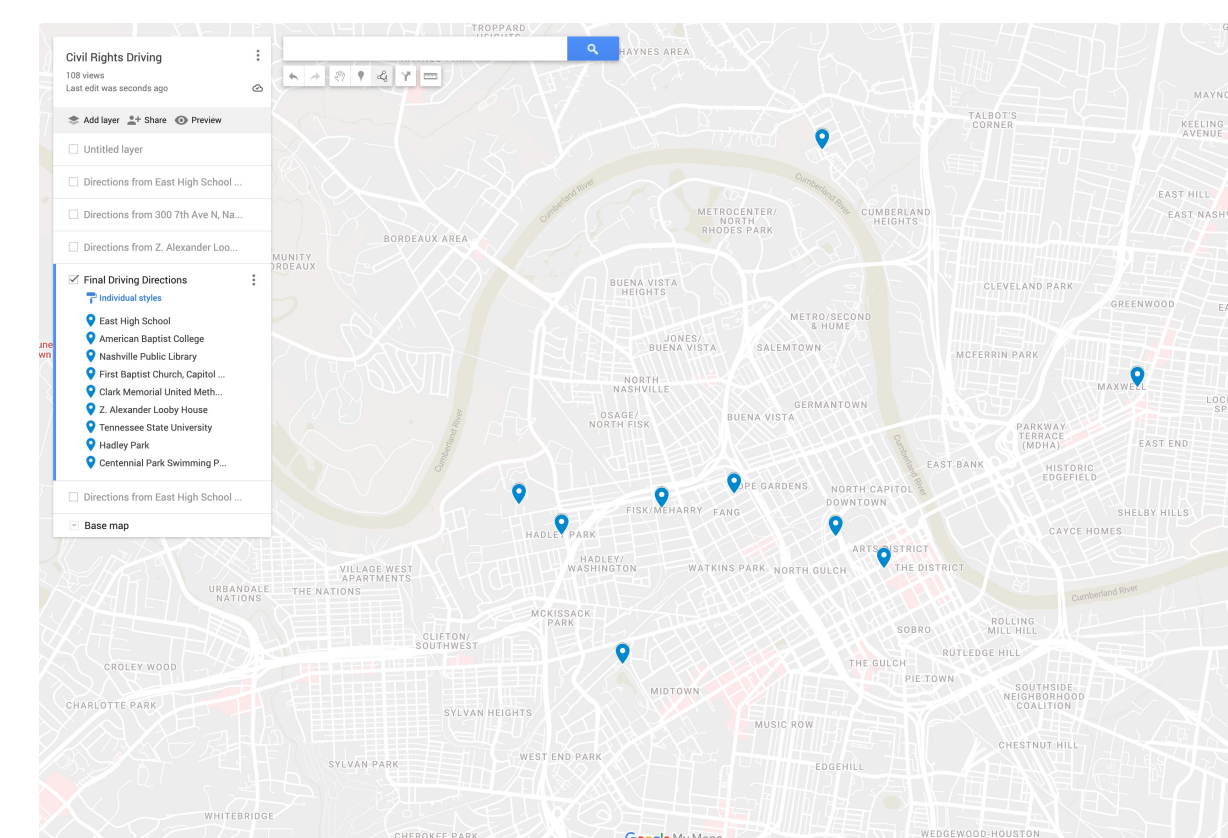


Image 6: Final stops included on Civil Rights Driving Tour

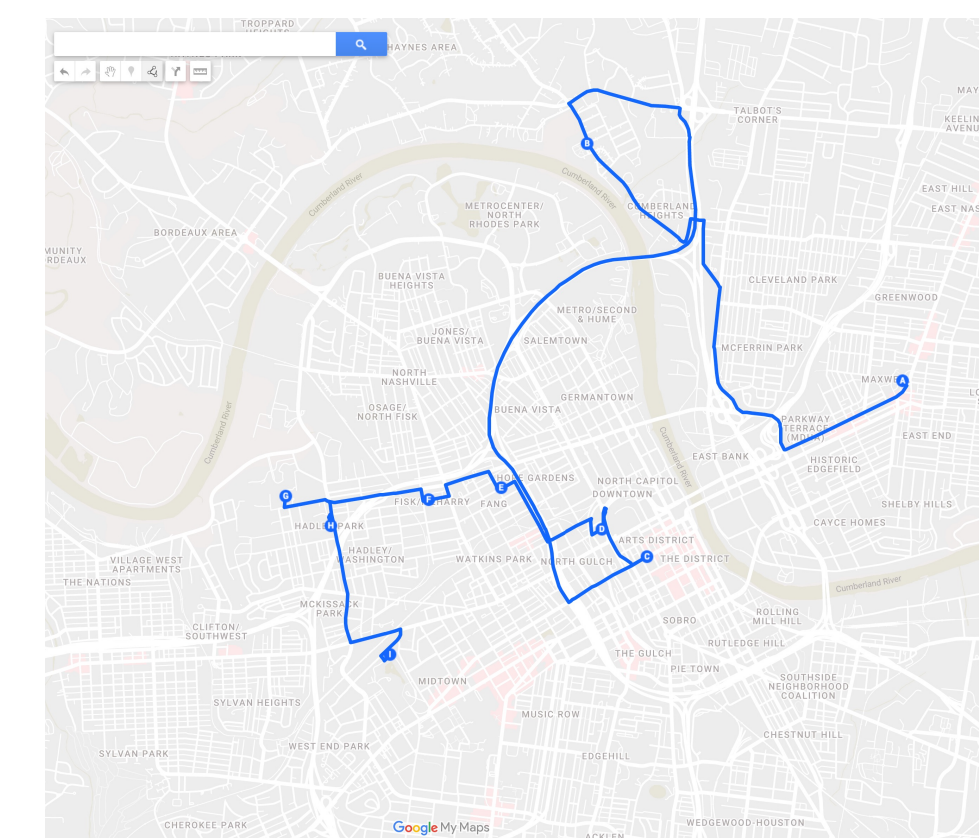


Image 7: Possible driving route for Civil Rights Driving Tour

Collaboration

This project benefited greatly from inter-institutional collaboration. In addition to the core Nashville Sites team, scholars from Fisk University and Tennessee State University contributed to the research and writing of the tour. Undergraduate students at both institutions also completed portions of the narrative. This aligns with Nashville Sites' previous work with community partners including educational institutions, local nonprofit and historical organizations, and tourism groups. These collaborations reflect the spirit of digital humanities, which encourages cross-discipline and inter-institutional partnerships.

Driving Tours Team: Dr. Brandon Owens (Fisk University); Dr. Mary Ellen Pethel (Belmont University); Jessica Reeves (Metro Historical Commission); Dr. Learotha Williams (Tennessee State University); Kayleigh Whitman (Vanderbilt University); Professor Linda Wynn (Fisk University and Tennessee Historical Commission)

Driving Tours

Strengths

One of the main goals of the driving tours, and what proved to be one of their greatest strengths, was that it would allow us to expand the tour routes to cover a wider geographic area. Broadening the geographic scope also meant that we could widen the narrative scope. The traditional walking tour is limited by the amount that a person can walk, as well as by infrastructural limitations like accessible sidewalks. As such, the stories and sites were confined to what was physically viable under these constraints. Driving tours allowed us to move beyond those sites that were in direct proximity to one another. One example would be the difference between our Civil Rights Sit-Ins tour (image 1) and the Civil Rights Driving tour. Based on time and distance, the former could only tell one, albeit central, story about the Nashville Movement, while the latter allowed us to consider the wider landscape of protest that characterized the movement, linking TSU, Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, Downtown and East Nashville together into one tour that crosses the city.

The driving tours also added a spatial dimension to the tours that was limited in the previous format. For example, those taking the Historic Jefferson Street tour in person are able to travel along the street and see firsthand the disruption caused by the interstate to the historic neighborhood.

Challenges

There were two challenges that we encountered in developing the tours. The first was how to adapt the present model, wherein takers can listen to the audio narration while walking, to the new method of driving. We did not want people to use the phone while driving and also had difficulties integrating the GPS components that would be necessary to navigate while driving. The solution we developed was providing the driving directions at the end of the previous stop.

We also realized that in expanding the geographic breadth of the tour, we had to find a way to pare down the the number of sites and organize them in a way that fit with the format. Unlike previous tours, we utilize what we call "sub-stops" in the driving tours. Participants drive to a fewer number of stops, but spend more time at each learning about the affiliated sites.

Acknowledgements

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Connect with the Project



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