

---

# Generous and Generative Communities for the Digital Humanities with the Digital Library of the Caribbean and Caribbean Studies

Laurie N. Taylor

laurien@ufl.edu

University of Florida, United States of America

---

## Introduction

The digital humanities offers the promise and potential for global, multilingual, and multicultural collaborations as enabled by digital technologies that deliver public-facing scholarship that enriches and expands research communities. Realizing that potential requires approaches that embrace complexity, spanning the technological, social, procedural, and community concerns. In 2016-2017, the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) is undertaking a research project to study and advance support for the Digital Humanities specifically with Caribbean Studies, focusing on leveraging technologies to support public-facing scholarship, open access to research and results, enabling digital humanities research publications with technologies that meet access needs, and collaboration among scholars and communities. This presentation provides background on dLOC as a digital library, dLOC's evolution into a community connecting place and platform for digital humanities and Caribbean Studies, and the opportunities and needs for the digital humanities for enlarging scholarly and worldwide community access to Caribbean Studies.

## About dLOC

The Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) is a unique, open access, collaborative, international, multi-lingual digital library for resources from and about the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean, providing access and ensuring preservation for Caribbean materials (digitized and born-digital) and public-facing scholarship.

dLOC focuses on how a community of practice can best create a digital library in terms of contents,

functionality, and robust governance for inclusivity and diversity. In dLOC's governance and operational model, partner institutions agree to shared goals and processes following a governance structure for: inclusive and distributed collection development where partners select materials, permissions-based infrastructure (partners retain all rights to materials), functional hubs, decentralized/local digitalization and digital curation, collaborative activities to develop the community of practice and increase capacity through collaboration. For all of this work—spanning tools for digitalization, online digital library functionality for patrons and users, tools for advanced querying and mining, and tools for automating reporting and user management which are necessary for operations at scale and reports to different governmental and academic entities—dLOC's technologies have been defined by and created in collaboration with partner institutions and scholars. Thus, over the past 12 years, dLOC has developed through collaboration into as a socio-technical (people, policies, communities, technologies) platform supporting collaboration among partner institutions, developing and enhancing communities of practice, and building intellectual infrastructure.

## dLOC, Caribbean Studies, and Digital Humanities

dLOC originally focused on building content, and has grown into one of the largest open access collections of Caribbean materials with over 2.5 million pages of content, over 40 partner institutions (universities, colleges, libraries, archives, museums, government agencies, NGOs, publishers, and scholarly societies, as well as many contributing scholars and private collectors), and over 3 million views each month. With this growth, the dLOC Executive Committee, Scholarly Advisory Board, and full community recognized the need to emphasize new stages of development, specifically focused on further engaging scholars in digital humanities practices that build upon dLOC's commitment to access, preservation, the production of public-facing scholarship, and engaging across institutions and communities to further the community of practice as a constellation of communities of practice where all involved are leveraging the affordances of technology to further public humanities and interdisciplinary aspects of modern scholarship.

In 2016, the dLOC Executive Committee charged the dLOC Digital Scholarship Director with undertaking research into next steps for dLOC's socio-

technical development (people, policies, technologies, communities) in relation to new opportunities with the digital humanities. dLOC currently supports the digital humanities in many forms, including curated materials and collections, digital humanities exhibits, pedagogical resources, teaching guides, and supporting faculty in developing online research and teaching materials.

dLOC's work in the digital humanities grapples directly with questions of access in the digital age. For example, one of dLOC's digital humanities projects is *Haiti: An Island Luminous*. *Haiti: An Island Luminous* began when then-PhD student Adam Silvia recognized the importance of materials about and from Haiti in dLOC, both for the significance of each item and for the sheer scale of materials available. Many of the materials in dLOC were not known to exist in the world, before being located by partner institutions and then digitized. Once the materials became available, the necessary scholarly and information ecosystems to link and cite the items was not in place. Indeed, scholars would be unlikely to search for items that were believed to have been lost to history. To create the necessary community connections, Silvia contacted members of the dLOC team and began collaborating to develop what was planned as an online exhibit to showcase materials. As the project began, the scope continued to grow. In its final release, *Haiti: An Island Luminous* is a curated edited online collection with contributions from over 100 of the top Haitian Studies scholars. *Haiti: An Island Luminous* is in English, French, and Kreyòl, and has been taught in schools in Florida and Haiti. Developed first online, the site is being developed for offline use on standalone kiosk/tablet installations, to meet access needs despite limited connectivity. Discussions are underway on the possibility of a print version to meet needs for limited online and electrical access, with the print version to include all pages from the curated edited collection online, samples of items, and with an accompanying USB drive.

Another example of dLOC's digital humanities work is the course "Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Migration, Money, and the Making of the Modern Caribbean." The course focused on the lesser studied Asian and Indian indenture in the Caribbean and was a Distributed Online Collaborative Course (DOCC), taught in multiple semesters and multiple iterations, most recently with the teaching team comprised of faculty, librarians, and archivists at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Barbados, University of Miami, University of Florida, and Amherst College. This

collaboratively developed and taught course engaged the teaching team and students across all of the campuses in the use of materials in dLOC, other digital resources, and not-yet-digital resources held at each of the institutions to create new works of digital scholarship with students from different campuses working collaboratively. The course is underway for revision to focus on migration and mobility, to further expand the potential collaborators and fields engaged in this interdisciplinary collaborative course.

Both the DOCC series and *Haiti: An Island Luminous* present real examples of imagined possibilities for expanding Caribbean Studies in the digital age for creating public-facing scholarship, enhancing access to scholarly works, opportunities from the digital humanities in pedagogy and academic curricula, and the potentials for access as enabled by collaboration among scholars and communities.

### Expanding Access through dLOC for Caribbean Studies and Digital Humanities

Caribbean Studies is an interdisciplinary field with broad connections across languages and cultures. dLOC takes its definition of the Caribbean from the Association of Caribbean University, Research, and Institutional Libraries, which defines the Caribbean as "the area of the Caribbean archipelago, the mainland countries including the Guianas, and the states of the United States which border on the Caribbean Sea or Gulf of Mexico." Even this is immediately expanded with diasporic connections. dLOC's success as a digital library is made possible by the recognition that the Caribbean exceeds the boundaries for any specific geographic area, language, or field of study, and by the generous framing for Caribbean Studies with the respect and support for interdisciplinary and diasporic connections.

dLOC was founded to meet the needs for preservation and access as a first step in supporting expanding the field of Caribbean Studies. As both the series of DOCCs and *Haiti: An Island Luminous* demonstrate, simply creating online access to materials is only part of the equation. As Adam J. Banks explains in *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*, access includes material access, which is met with materials being online, at least for those with online access and the functional access to be able to find and use materials. The digital humanities offers ways of conceiving and creating the means for experiential access, where materials are relevant for people's lives, and transformative access, where there is "a genuine inclusion in technologies

and the networks of power that help determine what they become, but never merely for the sake of inclusion" (45).

This presentation will review methodologies and results from the 2016-2017 research on the digital humanities and Caribbean Studies. The research includes site visits to the US Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Barbados, Curaçao, Trinidad, and Leiden (for the Dutch Caribbean Archives) to discuss current activities, projects, terminology, and framing to enable connections across communities. The site visits include engagement with scholars from multiple fields, museum professionals, librarians, archivists, governmental representatives, educators, and others. All materials from the research visits are shared with communities engaged and connected with Caribbean Studies through conferences and various means. This grounded approach allows for identification, recognition, and connection of digital humanities work being done, even when not previously labeled as such. The presentation will include findings on how dLOC is enabling responses and activities to meet the needs for material through transformational access through technologies, procedures, communities, and technologies.