



Image: 3D models created by SCMS M.F.A. students Ledis Molina and James Jean-Pierre

EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF FREEDOM: AUGMENTED REALITY TOUR OF MITCHELVILLE SOUTH CAROLINA GULLAH-GEECHEE HERITAGE SITE

FLORIDA ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITY RECEIVES
NEH DIGITAL PROJECTS
FOR THE PUBLIC
PLANNING GRANT

School of Communication and Multimedia Studies (SCMS) Assistant Professor **Topher Maraffi** received a Digital Projects for the Public "Discovery" grant of \$30,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his research "Exploring the Roots of Freedom: Augmented Reality Tour of Mitchelville South Carolina Gullah-Geechee Heritage Site." This transmedia project consists of a site-specific augmented reality tour application, a portable augmented reality museum installation, and a 360-degree interactive web site.



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The NEH grant is in addition to other grants Topher has received for the project. These include an Epic Games Megagrant of \$30,000, three Magic Leap headsets valued at \$7,500, and an award from the Walter and Lalita Janke Emerging Technologies Fund of \$8,400.

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"Using photography and descriptions of what the site was like during Reconstruction, we're going to recreate the site in 3D so people can see how the buildings looked, and what the people were like. We will be able to share many stories that currently aren't known and the way we are going to tell these stories is different than what you would see at any historical site. We are hoping we are going to create a framework for using augmented reality to make history come alive at any site."

- **Topher Maraffi**,
Assistant Professor, School of
Communication and
Multimedia Studies (SCMS)



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The Mitchelville Augmented Reality Tour explores the use of virtual and augmented reality to educate the public about the first Freedman's town in America, Mitchelville, located on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. The Union army had captured this area of Beaufort County early in the Civil War, then known as Port Royal, and enslaved Africans in the surrounding area were emancipated as "contrabands" of war. Known today as Gullah Geechee, the newly freed people were given the resources to create a self-governing town called Mitchelville, named after the Union general in charge of the Southern campaign.

Today, all the structures in Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park are gone, but the augmented reality project will allow visitors to see what life was like during the Reconstruction period. Through a free application on a mobile phone, visitors to the park will see structures and famous personalities of the time like Harriet Tubman and Robert Smalls. Viewers will get a better understanding of the Gullah Geechee culture and history that is not widely known by the general public.

This interdisciplinary project involves collaboration between scholars in the arts, humanities, and sciences from Florida Atlantic University, University of South Carolina Beaufort, Coastal Carolina University, North Carolina State University, and Columbus State University. Professor Maraffi's FAU graduate students in the Media, Technology, and Entertainment MFA program and undergraduate students in the Film, Video, and New Media BA program have also been collaborating on Mitchelville preproduction designs throughout the 2019-20 academic year.

Maraffi will be doing prototyping development of several scenes in the park over the next year, followed by full production of the final application in a couple years. To learn more, visit tophermaraffi.com/2019/06/09/fau-mten-lab
Podcast interview at fau.edu/artsandletters/podcast

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