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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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University of Richmond and Azavea Launch "Visualizing Emancipation" Web Application Prototype That Maps Emancipation Events during the Civil War

Over 3,000 events from military correspondence, newspapers, wartime letters and diaries are displayed on a map and sortable table

Philadelphia, PA, April 12, 2012 – University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab, with Azavea, a geospatial analysis (GIS) software development company, has launched "Visualizing Emancipation," the first interactive map showing the end of American slavery during the U.S. Civil War (http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation/). The application displays more than 3,000 geographically tagged emancipation events, such as reports of African Americans helping the Union, fugitive slave notices, insurrections and raids. It assists the telling of the complex story of emancipation by mapping documented evidence of African Americans' activities, viewed alongside the Union military movements and the shifting legal status of slavery during the war. The university and Azavea were partners in the application's development, funded by an Office of Digital Humanities start-up grant of $48,155 through the National Endowment for the Humanities' *We the People* initiative. The university matched the grant with more than $98,500 in cash and in-kind support.

Numerous primary sources document emancipation events, but they are widely scattered. Researchers working to put together historical pieces – the multiple authorities that exercised power over slaves during the war, and the time and place of related events – find the task daunting.

"Emancipation did not happen on just a few days, by a single document, or on a fixed field of battle," said Edward L. Ayers, president and historian of the American South at University of Richmond. "It came around the edges of the story. It started before the war began and ended long after the smoke cleared. It happened on dark roads and in formal government documents. It started, stopped, raced forward and cut back."

Ayers and Scott Nesbit, associate director of the lab, directed the project.

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"The trick," Nesbit said, " is finding and making events visible, while acknowledging the complexity of when, where and how slavery fell apart in the U.S. The site aims to make exploring emancipation more straightforward and understandable."

"Visualizing Emancipation" includes events pulled from many resources, including newspapers, letters and diaries from Cornell University's Making of America digital collection; Tufts University's Perseus Project digital library; the *Valley of the Shadow* online archive of the University of Virginia; and University of Richmond's Richmond *Daily Dispatch* digitized newspaper archive. An interactive timeline slider enables users to visualize events as points on a map or a searchable table, when they occurred and where Union regiments were located.

Using its high performance geoprocessing GeoTrellis framework, the Azavea software development team added the ability to see emancipation events on a heat map, showing the density of these events in all areas of the American South. An additional animation feature shows how the location of events and Union military positions changed throughout the war, enabling investigation of patterns of events. Events can also be searched by keyword, start and end dates, source (book, newspaper, official record, personal papers) and type of event. Clicking an event on the map displays an excerpt about it and a link to the primary source. Data about events and the legality of slavery at various locations can be downloaded from links on the application.

The web application combines open source and commercial tools, including: OpenLayers, GeoServer, PostGIS and an ArcGIS Online base map. The University of Richmond plans to both extend this prototype and incorporate it into a much more extensive digital Atlas of American History.

About the University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab
The lab develops innovative digital humanities projects that contribute to research and teaching at the university and beyond. It aims to integrate thoughtful interpretation in humanities and social sciences with innovations in new media. For more information, visit http://dsl.richmond.edu/ Nesbit and Ayers, the "Visualizing Emancipation" project directors, can be reached at snesbit@richmond.edu.

About Azavea
Azavea is an award-winning geospatial analysis (GIS) software development firm specializing in the creation of location-based web and mobile software as well as geospatial analysis services. Azavea is a certified B Corporation that applies geographic data and technology to promote the emergence of more dynamic, vibrant, and sustainable communities. Find more at http://www.azavea.com.

If you would like more information about Azavea or to schedule an interview with Robert Cheetham, Azavea CEO and President, please contact Amy Trahey at (215) 558 – 6184 or e-mail atrahey@azavea.com.

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