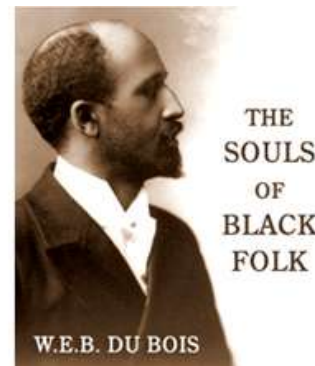
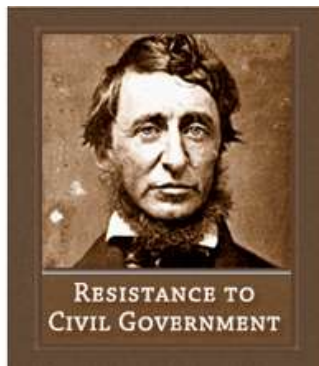
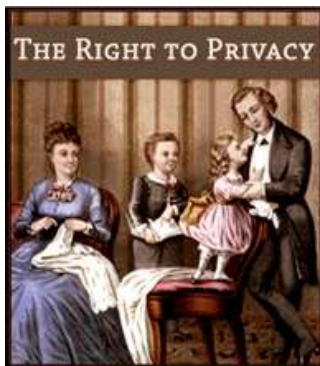


Reading New England: Using Digital Resources to Explore Landmark Texts



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Reading New England: Using Digital Resources to Explore Landmark Texts

UMass currently lags far behind other state universities in creating digital resources for academic research and public education. Our virtual invisibility in the expanding world of digital humanities scholarship and educational programming stands out, not only because we are so advanced in other aspects of technological progress, but also because our region has been home to so many towering figures in American intellectual and cultural history. While other public universities ranging from [New Jersey](#) to [Michigan](#) to [Washington](#) have digitized vast collections of materials related to their state histories, the literary and cultural heritage of New England, which includes the works of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emily Dickinson, Edith Wharton, William James, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jack Kerouac, Robert Frost, and many other significant writers, has yet to be situated within a stable and accessible digital framework. Some of the works of some of these authors have been featured on various websites, but we have yet to take advantage of digital technologies to make their writings available in a form that facilitates public awareness and comprehensive study of the rich intellectual history of New England. We have, consequently, not only fallen behind our counterparts elsewhere in making digital resources available to our students, we have missed the opportunity to establish UMass as a leading force within our region's increasingly Internet-dependent creative economy.

At UMass Press, we intend to meet this challenge by instituting Reading New England, a new imprint that will publish an ongoing series of digital critical editions of landmark works by our region's most important authors. Like paper-based critical editions of classic texts, each digital critical edition will include a comprehensive introduction, detailed annotations, and expert commentary. However, unlike paper-based books, our editions will also feature a wealth of documentary images, historical newspaper and periodical articles, and, as appropriate, sound and video files. These multimedia materials will be configured to locate primary texts within their historical eras, document their initial reception, and provide educational insight into especially important themes. While each digital critical edition will be designed for adoption in standard college courses, the inclusion of lively analysis and multimedia resources will make these editions interesting to first-time readers and established scholars alike.

We aim to make the offerings within Reading New England available on the Internet. Consequently, we need to devise a strategy that will persuade the public and private philanthropies and agencies to which we will turn for long-term funding that UMass Press's

digital critical editions deserve substantial support. At the same time, since we plan to promote collaboration among a wide range of schools, libraries, academic societies, and other educational and cultural organizations, we must demonstrate that Reading New England will become a resource for public education that will help to further the common objectives of all participants. Finally, having set out not merely to republish classic texts in digital form, but to use digital resources to shed new light on major cultural and literary landmarks, we need to show how Reading New England will foster fresh exploration of some of the most significant works in American political and social thought.

To achieve these goals, we shall begin by producing model digital critical editions of three especially important texts by authors associated with New England, Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren's "The Right to Privacy" (1890), Henry David Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government" (1849), and W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Each of these seminal texts provides its own justification for re-publication, but we also selected them because producing each will allow us to make a creative contribution both to digital humanities scholarship and to popular understanding of our region's special role in shaping major currents in American intellectual history.

In view of the labor-intensive technical aspects of this project, we are hoping to use our grant from the President's Creative Economy Fund to enable P.I. Susan Gallagher, who has some technical expertise, to spend 75% of her time during 2008-2009 working with a specialist in multimedia applications and academic technology to develop the digital infrastructures, design chapter templates, digitize selected documents, and configure multimedia materials for digital presentation. Since Susan will have already completed the digital critical edition of "The Right to Privacy" by this time, she plans to draw from what she learned in that process to produce first drafts of annotated versions of "Resistance to Civil Government" and *The Souls of Black Folk*. During this period, Susan will work with two research assistants, one from the Thoreau Society who will help with *Resistance to Civil Government*, and another from UMass Amherst's Afro-American Studies Department who will assist in gathering materials for the Du Bois volume from UMass collections.

By the spring of 2009, both projects will be sufficiently complete to enable the advisory editors to take up their responsibilities. Since Amilcar Shabazz, advisory editor for *Souls*, will become more actively involved at this point, we are seeking one course reduction for him during

the spring so that he can revise the annotated multimedia version of the volume as necessary to make certain that it makes a powerful contribution to Du Bois scholarship while also remaining accessible to college-level readers.

During these months, Susan will consult with Michael Frederick, Executive Director of the Thoreau Society, and Robert Gross, University of Connecticut, who have both signed on as advisory editors, to facilitate the creation of a draft of the annotated version of “Resistance to Civil Government.” Meanwhile, since this volume will feature representative American protest songs, Susan will also consult with Reebee Garofalo, College of Community and Public Service at UMass Boston, who will help to select music that illuminates the renewed popularity of “Resistance to Civil Government” among anti-war and civil rights activists of the 1960’s. Although our final production schedule will be affected by our success in obtaining additional grants later on, we plan to have *Resistance to Civil Government* ready for pre-publication review near the end of 2009 and *The Souls of Black Folk* ready early in 2010.

Throughout the grant period, Bruce Wilcox and his staff at UMass Press will offer publishing expertise at every stage, including the development of a plan to promote and publicize each digital critical edition. Bruce will supervise the peer-review process, following the normal procedures for paper-based books, and will present each edition to his faculty Editorial Board for approval. Bruce and his colleagues will also be exploring a variety of economic models -- ranging from pure open-access to hybrid subscription-based approaches -- designed to achieve the widest possible dissemination of the digital critical editions and to make it possible in the future to produce them on a self-sustaining and affordable basis.

Although we are still in the preliminary phases of establishing Reading New England as a permanent digital imprint at UMass Press, we have already begun to apply for grants that will help us to carry on over the long term. In early April, we submitted an application for a relatively small (\$50,000) Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant that was mainly designed to facilitate progress on the technical aspects of producing digital critical editions for a college-level readership. Using the NEH application as a starting point, Susan is planning to write an application to the Davis Educational Foundation in October for a three-year grant (approximately \$200,000) that focuses on producing digital critical editions both to enhance public understanding of New England’s uniquely rich contribution to American intellectual history and as a way to promote close reading of landmark texts among undergraduates. In preparing this

grant, Susan has consulted with Cheryl Nixon, English Department, UMass Boston, who won a Creative Economy grant last year to carry out an ongoing collaboration with the Boston Public Library (BPL) that focuses on making rare books more accessible to the public. Building on a shared commitment to using digital technologies to promote in-depth study of landmark works, Susan plans to work with Cheryl and other project participants to present Reading New England as a system-wide effort by UMass to partner with other public institutions, as well as academic organizations and historical societies, to take advantage of digital resources to make classic texts by regional authors, not merely available online, but truly conducive to deep learning in both face-to-face and online courses.

Since Cheryl is already working with the Boston Public Library, we hope to build on this relationship next year to facilitate an ongoing partnership to promote digital initiatives. More specifically, by beginning preliminary discussions now, we hope to position ourselves to apply in collaboration the BPL for a major multi-year grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, which is currently funding large-scale digital initiatives in a joint program with the NEH. Eventually, once we have firmly established ongoing collaborative partnerships with the BPL and other regional cultural and educational institutions, we intend to work towards the establishment of a regional digital humanities center that would draw from public and private funding to promote digital publications, exhibits, and programs on New England culture and history.

While we are still researching possibilities, we do know that we will be seeking additional support during and after this grant period. More specifically, building on the network of scholars, libraries, academic societies, and other organizations involved in our first three projects, we plan to seek funding, possibly from the Andrew Mellon Foundation, for an annual digital fellowship that will enable a scholar to come to UMass every year to spearhead the production of a digital critical edition of an important work by a New England author. To aid this effort, we are currently forming collaborative partnerships with other public institutions and cultural organizations in our region, especially libraries and historical societies that have not had opportunities (or, in some cases, the inclination) to participate in digital humanities projects.

Collaborating with regional educational and cultural organizations will enable UMass to develop digital publications that will serve as building blocks for a regionally specific humanities curriculum that can be shared among all campuses, as well as state and community colleges and

advanced high school programs throughout the Commonwealth. Moreover, by establishing this high-profile humanities curriculum, the Reading New England series will allow us to play a much more dynamic role in the creative economy of our region, especially in the burgeoning realm of cultural tourism. Making multimedia editions of works by New England's literary lights accessible both to students and the general public will enable UMass to tie itself directly to the cultural treasures that form the core of our regional identity and draw crowds of visitors here from across the nation and around the world.

Inspired by other universities' monumental contributions to digital humanities research and scholarship, Reading New England is designed to enable UMass to make its own mark by partnering with educational, cultural, and historical institutions and organizations to illuminate the remarkable intellectual ferment that has distinguished our part of the country. Over time, as the series expands to include digital critical editions of a wide array of landmark texts, we believe that *Reading New England* will become a prominent addition to the educational and cultural offerings that drive our creative economy and shape public understanding of the remarkably potent role that our region has played in the intellectual history of the United States.