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## Urban Illusions

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# URBAN ILLUSIONS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and  
Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine  
Arts

in

The School of Art

By  
Haley Hatfield  
B.F.A., Kansas State University, 2014  
May 2017

I would like to dedicate this thesis on behalf of anyone that has ever been stereotyped or discriminated against. Keep your head up.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

*Urban Illusions* is an immersive and interactive documentary experience that curates moments of reality in virtual environments to educate and expose viewers to a string of social and political issues that have been exposed in Baton Rouge. These moments also reflect a transformative time across the United States. The research and exhibition experiments with 360-degree videos and virtual reality to document issues occurring from racial tension stemming from prejudicial police violence and residual segregation that is still present in Baton Rouge. The intent of this work is to establish a methodology benefiting from modern technology in order to document real life through virtual space to inform the viewer about social problems in the everyday experience of disadvantaged groups across America. The methodology framework used for *Urban Illusions* has the potential to be utilized by other digital artists and collaborators to engage and educate the viewers about a multitude of contemporary concepts.



## INTRODUCTION

*Urban Illusions* began with the purpose of using virtual reality as a new method to document and share historic Louisiana events in a realistic VR experience in order to create a more accurate representation. I started focusing on exposing the residual, or remaining, segregation of Baton Rouge by interviewing local residents on their experiences. Shortly after I conducted my first interviews, tragedy struck the city in July of 2016. On July 5th, there was a controversial shooting and death of a black man, Alton Sterling, by the hands of the police. Several protests ensued in the following weeks. On July 17th, six police officers were gunned down, three of which lost their lives. *Urban Illusions* is my approach at creating another depth to the events that made national media coverage last summer while also digging a little deeper into the hearts of the residents of Baton Rouge.

Documentary and journalistic film techniques are a way of communicating the moment. *Urban Illusions* is an interactive installation that derives from the need to adapt how history and information is documented and archived. My intent with this work is to use modern technology, such as virtual reality, to create a new dimension of documenting realism through a virtual interactive environment focused on Baton Rouge.

Some documentary techniques, like cinéma vérité, consider the position the filmmaker takes within the recorded world. The maker plays the role of observer, but they are also immersed in the environment being filmed whereas, “the filmmaker acts as an observer, attempting not to alter the situations he witnesses any more than he must

simply by being there.”<sup>1</sup> It creates a balance of becoming a participant while also being the creator. Typically the filmmaker remains unseen from the camera view, but with 360-degree videos that becomes nearly impossible. The main purpose of cinéma vérité is to film an uncontrolled setting to document it in the most realistic manner. Often times the final documentation is setup to not reveal a specific point but rather is left up on interpretation from the viewer to create their own stance.

Documentary films are dedicated to capturing realities in all aspects of the world. However, there has always been speculation following documentaries because the director only shows what they want the viewer to believe.<sup>2</sup> It has become too easy to crop out and edit videos in order to appear truthful or *real*. My use of the recently developed 360-degree GoPro camera aims to take away this speculation simply because there are no borders, and when viewed through a virtual reality headset, like the Oculus Rift, then the experience becomes completely immersive. What is filmed is no longer limited to the bounding boxes of a single camera resolution. Documenting in 360-degrees allows the viewer to see everything, not only in front of them but also to each side and behind them. This is possible with the use of six cameras filming at once from a central point. As my previous point suggested, this also means that I must be present in the filming process, and it creates a unique perspective to be able to virtually share my own experience using several pieces of the latest software and equipment available. Although this work documents my experiences, *Urban Illusions* is set up to be

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<sup>1</sup> "Cinema Verite: Definitions and Background." Mitpress.mit.edu. Accessed November 30, 2016. <[https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/content/9780262630580\\_sch\\_0001.pdf](https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/content/9780262630580_sch_0001.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Nam, Yoommy. "Cinema Verite Vs. Direct Cinema: An Introduction". New York Film Academy. NYFA.edu. November 20, 2015. <<https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/>>. Accessed November 20, 2016.

unbiased in order for the viewer to have a personal interaction and to interpret the meaning of the virtual experience for themselves. This begs the question: Is it then still my experience I'm sharing or does the virtual documentation create a personal experience for the viewer?

Documentary films have been around for decades, but the uniqueness of placing 360-degree footage into a virtual reality setting proposes a revolutionary, personal experience that can educate the audience by placing them in the creator's point of view. Much of the VR seen before the twenty-first century was left up to science-fiction movies. The world did not start to see much of what could actually be deemed as "virtual reality" today, until the early 1990's with video games like the *Virtuality Group Arcade Machines* or Nintendo's *Virtual Boy*.<sup>3</sup> Still much of virtual reality is used as entertainment purposes within video games or commercial art. Recently it has been opened up for more purposes ranging from job training simulators to even helping children with autism.<sup>4</sup> The Louvre in Paris, France has even taken the step into the virtual reality industry by creating an interactive 360-degree experience throughout the museum.<sup>5</sup> With virtual reality technology on the rise, there is no doubt there will be much more to experience and learn through VR in the near future.

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<sup>3</sup> "History of Virtual Reality." Virtual Reality Society. Vrs.org.uk. <<http://www.vrs.org.uk/virtual-reality/history.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Applications of Virtual Reality." Virtual Reality Society. Vrs.org.uk. <<http://www.vrs.org.uk/virtual-reality-applications/>>.

<sup>5</sup> "Experience Louvre Museum in Virtual Reality." Youvisit.com. <<http://www.youvisit.com/tour/65297/80769>>. November 10, 2016.

## Background

*Urban Illusions* began when I had hit a discouraging point in my research and work. The last two years had been spent studying different aspects of how racism has repeatedly affected this country since its founding. Growing up in the Midwest, I never paid much attention to racism. Quite frankly, living in the Midwest and being born into a middle-class white family, I never *had* to pay attention to it. I was never exposed to many people of other races where I am from. Most of the rural areas of the Midwest still maintain majority white-populated areas. It was not until I moved two hours away from the small town I was raised into the larger and more diverse college town of Manhattan, Kansas until I began interacting with people from all over the country during my undergraduate experience. I feel the need to mention this because I have since learned, taking a Stereotypes & Discrimination course at LSU, that often times the reason people stereotype is due to a lack of interaction with other races and religions. I was able to interact and befriend people of other races and I began to discover that not everybody was living the same experiences I was as a white woman. I dedicated my work to expose these issues after witnessing the effects of racism on my closest friends.

When I moved to the South to start graduate school, I was placed in an even more diverse area of the country where the population is 58% White (Non-Hispanic) and 36% Black (Non-Hispanic) whereas Wichita, Kansas, is 72% White (Non-Hispanic) and 12% Black (Non-Hispanic).<sup>6</sup> Despite there being a similar population of white and non-white residents (345,000 compared to 470,000 in 2012), there is still a

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<sup>6</sup> Diversitydata.org. <<http://www.diversitydata.org/Data/Profiles/Show.aspx?loc=160>>. March 1, 2017.

distinct separation, which only adds to the lack of interaction between people. In my work, I have set out to find ways to expose this racial separation and lack of interaction in order to aid to the extinction of stereotypes and racism.



Figure 1

Past works that led me to *Urban Illusions* include *96 Years of Riots* (Figure 1) and *New New Orleans*. *96 Years of Riots* is a video piece that compares four different U.S. cities that have had a history of at least two separate riots resulting from an act of racial injustice. The cities used were Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Baltimore in the time span of 1919 to 2015. I used found footage of these race riots to create a juxtaposition which shows the disturbing similarity between each event through a century of American history. The purpose of this piece is to expose that lack of progress; although the media tends to portray progress in America's race relations, the disturbing reality viewed in *96 Years of Riots* shows otherwise. This historical video piece led me to begin translating these problems a little closer to home to a site-specific location in Louisiana. I chose to focus on New Orleans which is located about fifty miles south of Baton Rouge. During my travels to New Orleans, I was disturbed to find that there are areas that have not been touched since Hurricane Katrina struck

over ten years ago. This began *New, New Orleans*, a video and projection mapping piece made up of interviews from New Orleans residents telling their stories on the gentrification, racism, crime, and overall change of the city since Katrina. I then projected these interviews onto the live oaks that have been growing in the New Orleans City Park for centuries (Figure 2). I chose to use the live oaks as a symbol to represent the history and years of strength as well as growth for the city. The projections on the trees created a very stimulating image that I wanted to continue to work with. However, I felt my work lacked the personal connection I desired having grown up in Kansas far from the devastation of Katrina.



Figure 2

## Starting *Urban Illusions*

I decided to challenge myself to focus my concerns on the city I currently live in, Baton Rouge. I began looking into the overall racial separation of the city and realized it is actually worse than New Orleans.<sup>7</sup> The “racial dot map” created by Dustin Cable at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center shows the racial demographics of the entire United States based on the 2010 census. Upon examining Baton Rouge there is a very disturbing and obvious racial divide (Figure 3).<sup>8</sup> This same pattern can be observed for most cities throughout the United States.

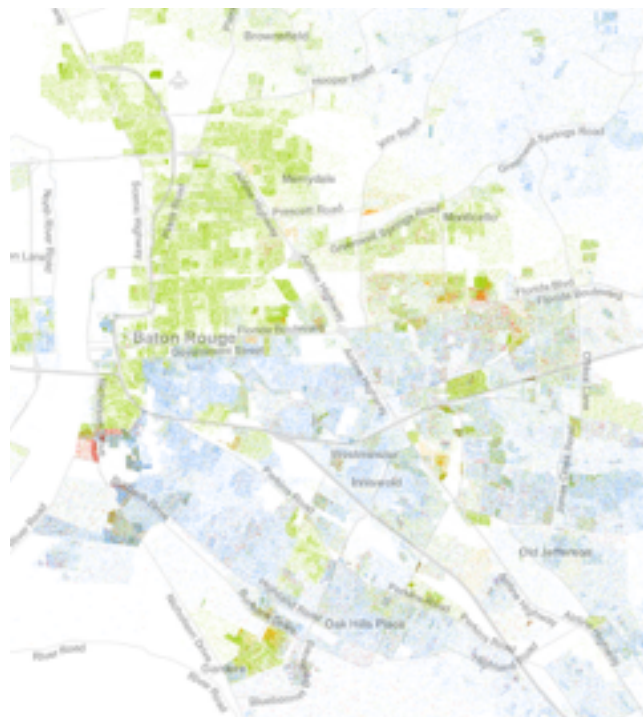


Figure 3

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<sup>7</sup> Cable, Dustin. “The Racial Dot Map.” Coopercenter.org. <<http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> “The Racial Dot Map.” [Close up of Baton Rouge, Louisiana]. Blue dots represent White population, Green represents Black, red represents Asian, and orange represents Hispanic.

A 2014 article from LSU's student run news service LSU Now focused around Louisiana State University and its neighboring northern area known as Old South Baton Rouge. This neighborhood was once an energetic, multi-ethnic and primarily black-populated part of Baton Rouge that was generally ignored by the LSU community. That was before the I-10 interstate was built through the neighborhood, destroying homes and displacing many families. The construction of the interstate began around the time of desegregation in the 1960s and businesses in the area never recovered.<sup>9</sup> This sort of development is not unique to Baton Rouge and can be seen in many cities nationwide. Major highways are historically known for ripping apart minority populated neighborhoods and aiding in the residual segregation that remains decades after desegregation laws. The article describes the detachment between LSU and its outlying community as “a decrepit neighborhood with poor people roaming the streets falls into the shadows of the University’s multi-million-dollar buildings and luxury condominiums.”<sup>10</sup>

Few people are aware of the effects of residual segregation and the circumstances that have led to it. Denying services and other redlining techniques has a profound impact on the locations people move to and the struggles residents have. Throughout my graduate research, I have met many people, black and white, that had never thought about how some neighborhoods remain predominantly black or white; to them it has simply been thought of as just the way things are.

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<sup>9</sup> "BR Interstate section opens Friday morning". *State-Times*. Baton Rouge. September 15, 1964. p.

<sup>10</sup> Gallo, Andrea. "Poverty Lives in LSU's Culturally and Historically Rich Neighbor." Lsunow.com. April 2, 2014. <[http://www.lsunow.com/poverty/poverty-lives-in-lsu-s-culturally-and-historically-rich-neighbor/article\\_94c05a46-bac9-11e3-a0e2-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.lsunow.com/poverty/poverty-lives-in-lsu-s-culturally-and-historically-rich-neighbor/article_94c05a46-bac9-11e3-a0e2-001a4bcf6878.html)>.



The fact that it is 2017 and most people, of all races, are inherently unaware of the residual segregation and implicit biases that happen every day is astonishing. That is why I feel a responsibility behind *Urban Illusions* to create this immersive documentary with emerging technology platforms to expose these issues and enlighten those that may be unaware of the real state of American race relations.

## THE PROCESS

I am interested in the need to adapt how history and information is documented and archived in an ever-changing technological landscape I want to be able to share what I learn, see, and feel, my experiences and my reality, in a way that allows others to experience it for themselves. I believe virtual reality can do that while also creating a unique experience for the person exposed to the virtual reality. How do my personal experiences translated into virtual space impact others by creating their own experience through mine? Through *Urban Illusions* I have explored the role as documenter, observer, and archivist while also being the participant. Even though I am documenting my experience, I am creating it in a way to allow others to see it virtually and in first person in order to interpret it for themselves. Does this mean it is still my experience? Or is this new virtual experience somehow different for others immersed within the virtual environments? I am drawn to the connection of factual reality being experienced as virtual reality with how it affects the viewer and how it is interpreted. With the combination of VR, 360-degree video, Maya, and Unity I created a multi-location landscape exposing viewers to social and political issues throughout Baton Rouge during a pivotal moment in history.

### The Locations and the People

Each location within the *Urban Illusions* virtual experience represents an important role to the message I am communicating. It was essential that I presented these places in as much of a tangible way as possible because I am filming actual site-specific locations and want to transport the participant to them. Having been drawn to

Old South Baton Rouge, I sought out to find the remnants of this once lively neighborhood that much of the LSU community continues to ignore. I felt that this location was important because this neighborhood had been purposefully selected as the most appealing place to construct an interstate through.<sup>11</sup> Today if one was to drive underneath where the I-10 begins after the Mississippi River they would find a dismal park, rightly named Expressway Park. This park was a late attempt to revitalize a small aspect of the neighborhood that had been demolished. Even though this park has a couple basketball courts, a scruffy football field and a walking path, it does not feel welcoming. Standing beneath the interstate I could not help but feel an eerie similarity between the live oaks of *New, New Orleans* to now having this canopy of tall, stark concrete pillars looming overhead. Standing there knowing that there once stood a family's home and it was ripped away to be replaced with this. Knowing the history of this once thriving location, it became the central environment of *Urban Illusions* (Figure 4).

After deciding on this location, I set out to find residents to interview to share their experiences and their knowledge about the residual segregation of Baton Rouge. I wanted to allow others to feel like they were having a conversation with these people just as I was. Interactions with new people grant opportunities to hear different opinions that can be influential and add to one's own outlook on life as well as exposure to social issues. I strived to interview a wide range of residents from age, race, years of residency,

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<sup>11</sup> Gallo, Andrea. "Poverty Lives in LSU's Culturally and Historically Rich Neighbor." Lsunow.com. April 2, 2014. <[http://www.lsunow.com/poverty/poverty-lives-in-lsu-s-culturally-and-historically-rich-neighbor/article\\_94c05a46-bac9-11e3-a0e2-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.lsunow.com/poverty/poverty-lives-in-lsu-s-culturally-and-historically-rich-neighbor/article_94c05a46-bac9-11e3-a0e2-001a4bcf6878.html)>.



Figure 4

neighborhoods lived, education, and occupation in order to get a wide range of experiences to share. Overall, I was able to interview residents from ages eighteen to sixty-eight, from a high-school graduate to a doctorate professor, as well as someone living in a primarily black neighborhood compared to a primarily white neighborhood.

Originally I had planned on projecting these interviews on the pillars underneath the interstate, but I quickly found out due to technology and lighting limitations, I wasn't able to do that. Which led me to use Unity to make the interviews more interactive while still being able to place the residents within the interstate location (Figure 5).

Two days after my I conducted my first interview tragedy struck Baton Rouge on July 5, 2016. About five miles from LSU's campus there was a controversial shooting and death of a black man, Alton Sterling, at a Triple S Food Mart by the hands of police officers. I decided to include this location with a 360-degree camera because I would be able to capture everything around me within this environment. I wanted to allow others to see and feel as if they were standing where I had stood. To be able to see and

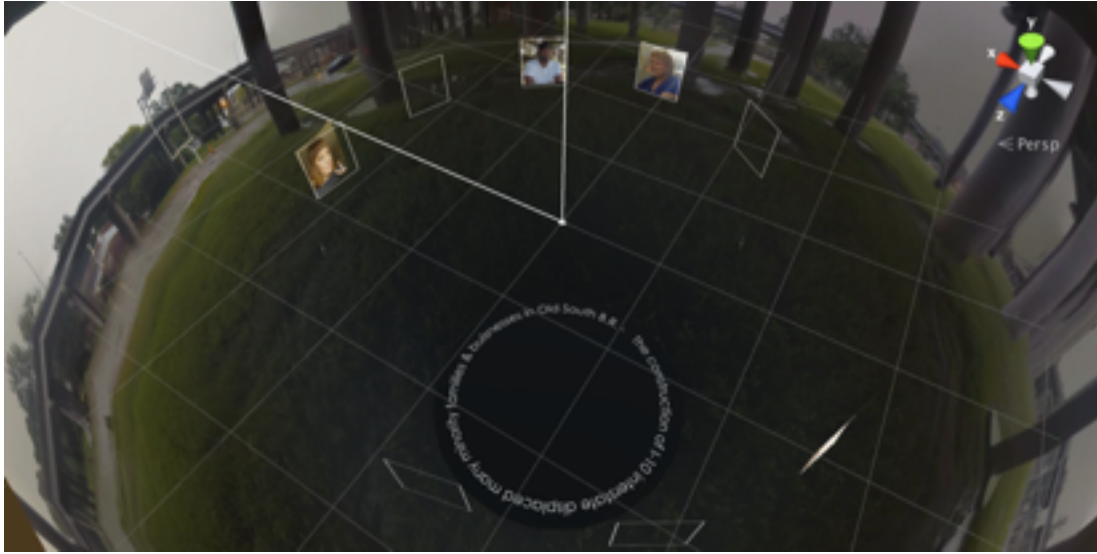


Figure 5

empathize with visual proof of the affected community that lost someone in this unjust way and of the obvious tension between races within the city.

As with most circumstances of this context, feelings of anger and hurt followed in the form of marches and protests. For the first time in my life, I chose to be a part of a movement I believed in and I marched with thousands of others on July 10, 2016 to support equality among races in hopes to help bridge the divide (Figure 6)<sup>12</sup>. The march started as a beautiful diverse group of people all coming together for a cause but it was met with a very frightening end. I have never experienced the kind of fear I felt that day standing near the corner of East Boulevard and France Street which is why I chose this location as the third environment of *Urban Illusions*.

While I was in the crowd of people, I filmed with my DSLR camera. I did not take the 360-degree camera with me but I still wanted to somehow share my frightening experiences. In order to do that, I went back to this place I had once been so

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<sup>12</sup> "Baton Rouge, LA." Map. *Google Maps*. Google, 30 November 2016. Web. 30 November 2016. [with added markers].

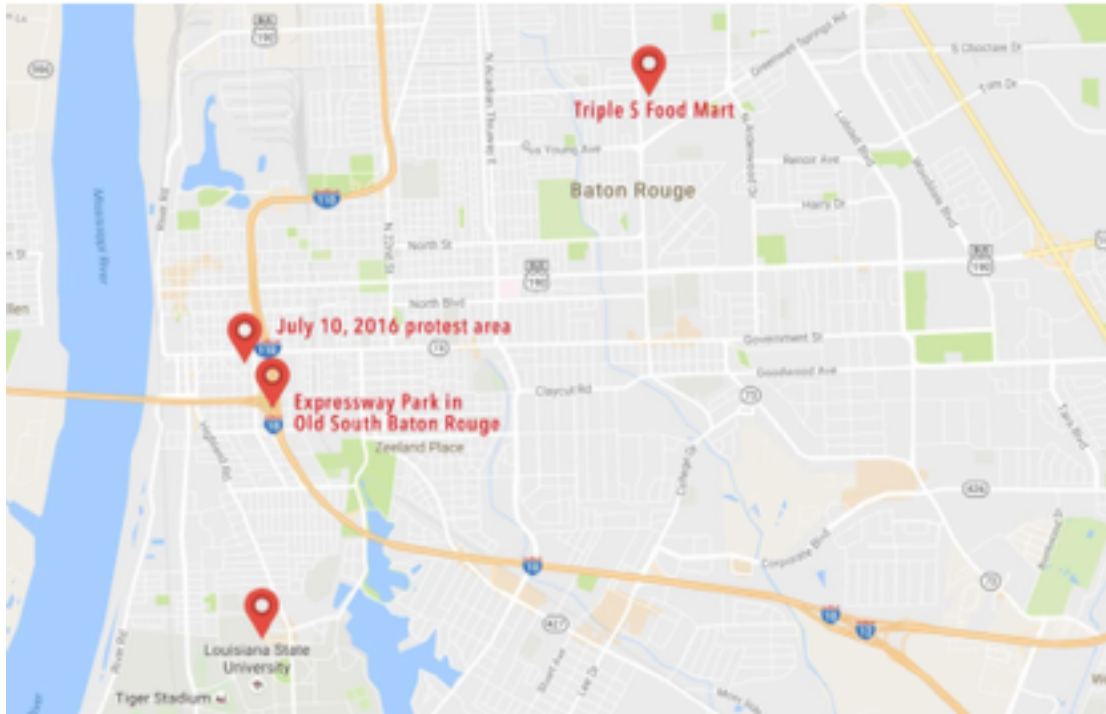


Figure 6

overwhelmed with fear at and filmed in 360-degrees what was now a peaceful and quiet neighborhood. I created hover over effects within the VR experience to contrast these peaceful scenes. I wanted the scenes from the protests to jump out at the viewer and to trigger the sense of fear that I had felt. According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, authors of *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, “Virtual reality can disappear as an interface and give the viewer the same emotions that she would feel in the real world. If virtual reality can evoke emotions, how can our culture deny that the experience of virtual reality is authentic?”<sup>13</sup> This means that virtual reality can be used to recreate a genuine personal experience and stimulate real emotions.

Overall, the project focused on three main locations. The main location,

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<sup>13</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 164-165, accessed March 20, 2017, [https://monoskop.org/images/a/ae/Bolter\\_Jay\\_David\\_Grusin\\_Richard\\_Remediation\\_Understanding\\_New\\_Media\\_low\\_quality.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/a/ae/Bolter_Jay_David_Grusin_Richard_Remediation_Understanding_New_Media_low_quality.pdf).

Expressway Park, which includes interactive links to the interviews of nine residents and also branches off to the other two locations (Figure 7). The full piece can be viewed with either an Oculus Rift or a Google VR Cardboard on an iOS device.

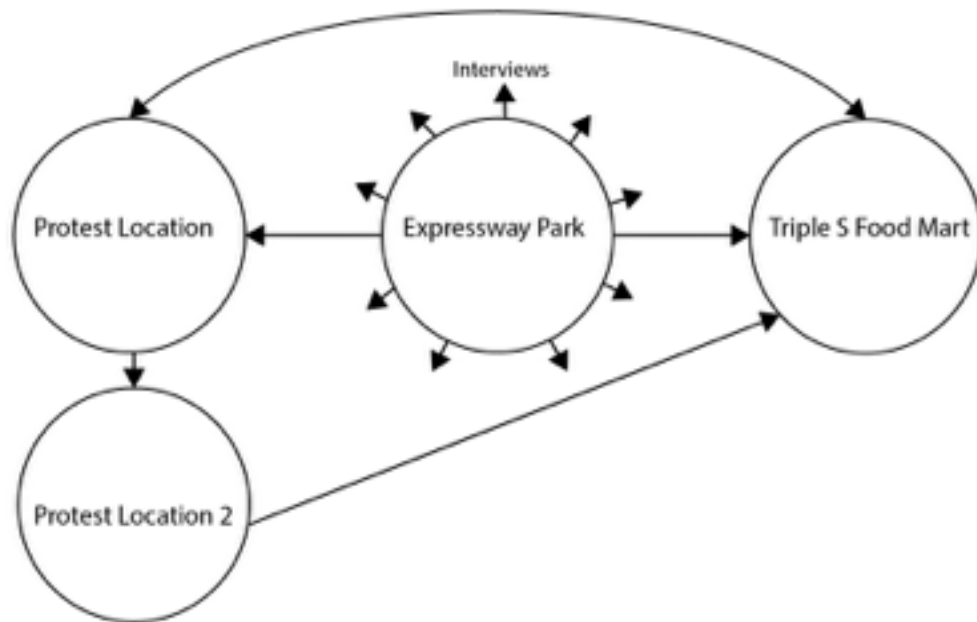


Figure 7

## The Technology

The process to create *Urban Illusions* has been a very extensive one where I have utilized and combined several pieces of digital equipment and software. The chart below lists the digital equipment and software used to create the full virtual experience.

Equipment	Software
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ MacBook</li> <li>■ DSLR camera</li> <li>■ GoPro 360 camera</li> <li>■ Google Cardboard</li> <li>■ iPhone</li> <li>■ Oculus Rift</li> <li>■ Projectors</li> <li>■ Zotac Mini PC</li> <li>■ 6 Mini iPads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adobe Illustrator</li> <li>■ Adobe Photoshop</li> <li>■ Adobe Premiere Pro</li> <li>■ QuickVoice recorder app</li> <li>■ Kolor Autopano Giga 4.2</li> <li>■ Kolor Autopano Video Pro</li> <li>■ Autodesk Maya</li> <li>■ Unity + Assets</li> <li>■ Google VR SDK for Unity</li> <li>■ Oculus SDK for Unity</li> <li>■ Xcode</li> </ul>

For the final show, I will have the Oculus Rift immersive experience set up, a digital image of the 3D environment modeled in Maya serving as a metaphor of the concept, a projection mapping compilation of each of the interviews, six iPads with a full 360-degree interaction application of *Urban Illusions* and six Google Cardboards for viewers to download the iOS app themselves from the Apple App Store. Following the closing reception will be an impromptu dialogue for those who wish to participate and ask questions in response to the overall content of *Urban Illusions*.

I chose to create *Urban Illusions* to work on a multitude of device formats so that I could have a wide range of accessibility for the users. The overall Unity development between the Oculus Rift and iOS builds remained the same. The only difference between the iPad 360 interaction and the iOS Application is that the Google Cardboard VR lens outline is hidden for the iPad build. I did have to alter some UI elements within Unity and export with the correct formatted SDK's (software development kit) build to work with either device. The biggest difference between the Google VR and Oculus Rift builds were the way the user was able to control how they interacted with the UI. The Google VR for the iPad and Cardboard used a touch



screen controlled interaction, while the Oculus Rift used a gaze control method where the user had to stare for three seconds at an interactive element to engage with it. To do this, I was able to make use of several assets from the Unity Asset Store. For the Google VR reticle gaze I purchased the GazeClick asset for five dollars.<sup>14</sup> This asset was used as the main reticle for interaction but for the final build I did not set the gaze function active and instead utilized it more as a cursor with a touch screen function. I used a similar gaze asset for the Oculus build called Gaze UI for Canvas.<sup>15</sup> However, this free asset did not automatically work with some of the native Unity VR and Google VR SDK C# scripts. This created one of my biggest challenges in developing my own C# script with the gaze input to use for the video hover over pop up effects for the Oculus Rift build.

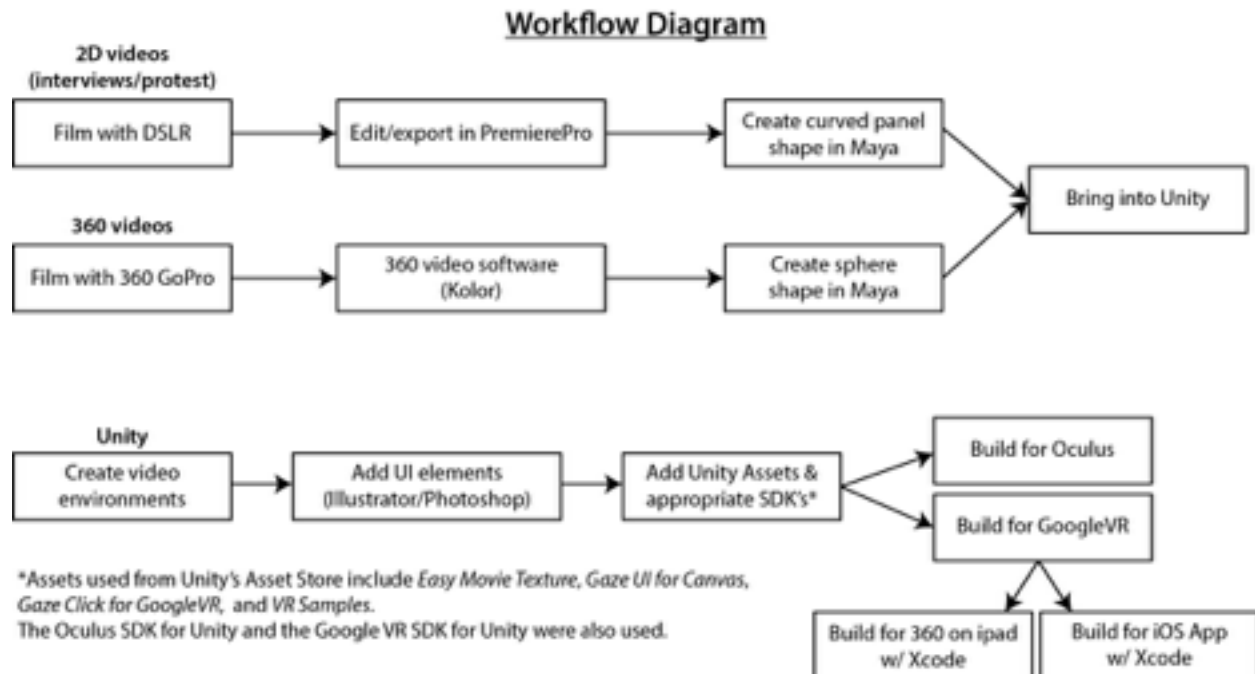
In order to play the videos as textures within Unity, I purchased another asset from Unity's Asset Store called Easy Movie Texture for \$65.<sup>16</sup> This asset's scripts allowed for all of my videos to be used as a texture on top of an object and to create a spatial audio environment. An example of my workflow is as followed:

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<sup>14</sup> Ateo. *GazeClick for GoogleVR*. Unity Asset Store. [www.assetstore.unity3d.com](http://www.assetstore.unity3d.com). Version 1.3. January 6, 2017. <<https://www.assetstore.unity3d.com/en/#!/content/77469>>.

<sup>15</sup> Youe++. *Gaze UI for Canvas*. Unity Asset Store. [www.assetstore.unity3d.com](http://www.assetstore.unity3d.com). Version 0.1. October 11, 2016. <<https://www.assetstore.unity3d.com/en/#!/content/70881>>.

<sup>16</sup> JaeYunLee. *Easy Movie Texture*. Unity Asset Store. [www.assetstore.unity3d.com](http://www.assetstore.unity3d.com). Version 3.57. July 18, 2013. <<https://www.assetstore.unity3d.com/en/#!/content/10032>>.



I purchased a membership as an Apple Developer and began going through the steps to get *Urban Illusions* published on the App Store. This was one of my biggest challenges because I had never built a mobile application before, but I wanted to be able to share this project with as many people as possible and having a published app seemed like the best idea. After several weeks of navigating my way through Xcode and uploading my GoogleVR build to the Apple Developer site, I officially have my first published app on the App Store (Figure 8).

For whichever device the user is interacting with, whether it's the iPad, downloaded app, or Oculus Rift, when they first step into the virtual experience, they are met with several choices. The user is surrounded by the nine residents that were interviewed about their experience as well as two other options to venture to other parts of the city (Figure 9). Once the user clicks on a resident, they are transported into a one-on-one setting to listen to the interview and they can also read a small bio about

that person. I think it is important to allow for the user to have a more personal immersive interaction with these strangers in order to experience a different insight. The audience may even realize that these residents share the same opinions or views but would have never made that connection without the virtual experience allowing the audience to step out of their comfort zones. I believe that VR used in this way can be very beneficial towards bringing awareness and exposure to many of the political and social issues in America.

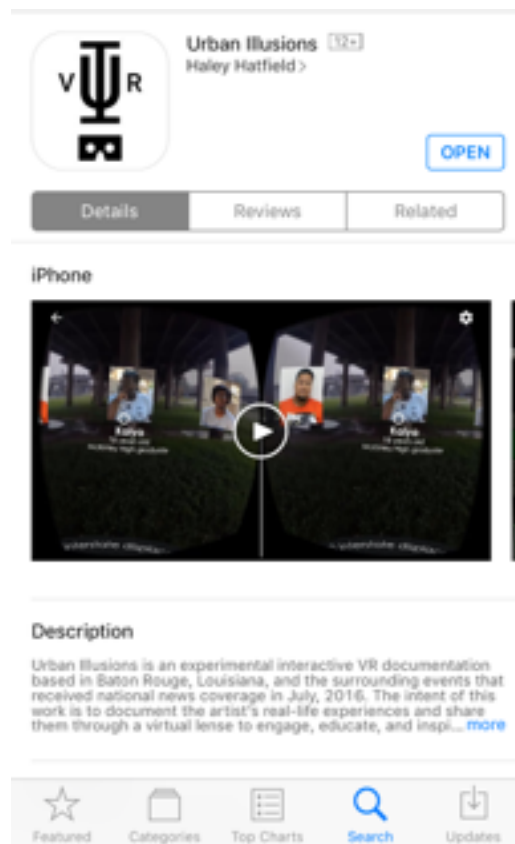


Figure 8



Figure 9

If the user clicks on the buttons to transport them to the Triple S Food Mart, they are then transported to stand directly in front of the place where Alton Sterling was shot. The user is able to stand where he once stood and see the affected community. I want the user to be able to empathize with the place and reaction they are able to experience because even if the user has never been to this part of Baton Rouge or it is not their own community, it does not make this place any less valuable than the rest of the city. To be able to combine reality with virtual reality allows the user to see and be around the people that live in this area. Virtual reality used in the form of an immersive documentary could potentially allow the user to register that these are real people and these issues are very real for those within black communities (Figure 10).

If the user clicks to visit the location where the march and protests took place, then they will be brought to a quiet neighborhood off of East Boulevard located only a couple blocks from the Expressway Park (Figure 11). Here the user will be immersed within what appears to be just a regular neighborhood but I have added interactive effects to show what this place looked like on July 10, 2016. Once the user hover



Figure 10

overs a UI element, like the outline of a house, footage I took the day I was there will be thrown before the user's eyes. I want the user to see and experience the contrast of just a regular neighborhood in Baton Rouge being transformed into a sight of riot geared police officers against protesters. It is, and it was, a very frightening experience to partake in (Figure 12).



Figure 11



Figure 12

Overall with this immersive documentary experience, I want the user to leave having learned something they did not know before they put on the virtual reality headset or moved around with the iPad's 360 integration. Being able to use virtual reality to preserve and document real historical events has so much potential to teach and leave the viewer with a new level of insight. A lot of what is learned throughout history is only found in books, but to be able to physically transport oneself to a moment in time could be life-changing for someone. It allows for a more personal interpretation and self-reflection because in a sense, it is the user's own experience but through a virtual lens.

## THE SHOW



Figure 13



Figure 14



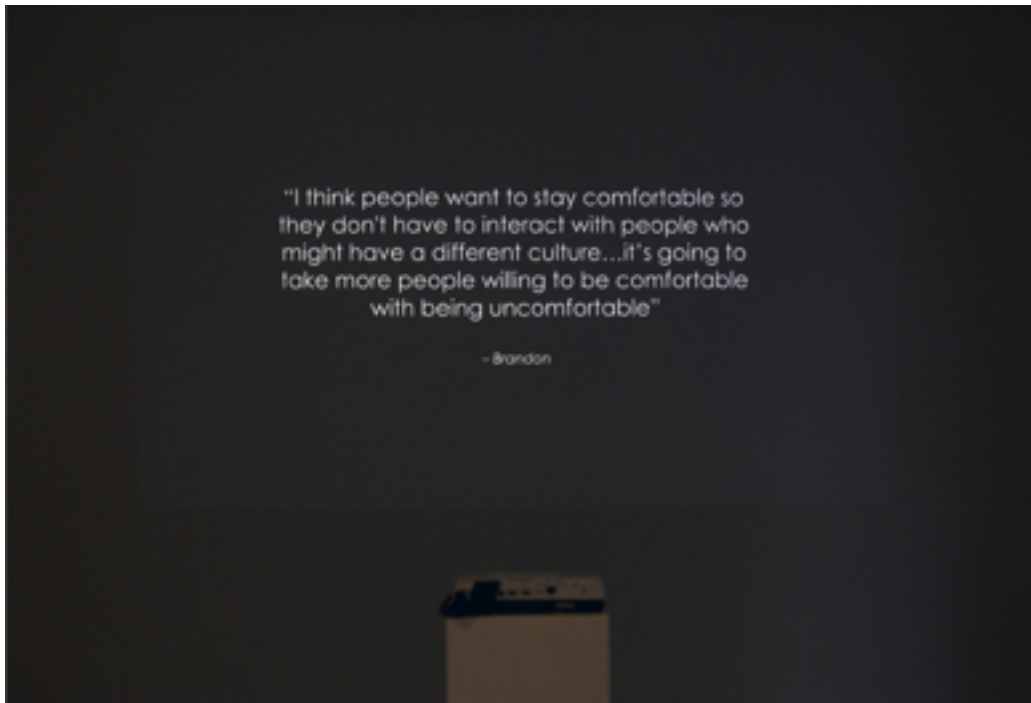


Figure 15



Figure 16





Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



## INFLUENCES

There are many works being created with 360-degree videos and virtual reality now such as the Here Be Dragons Studio and artist collaborations. For example, a collaboration with artists Chris Milk and Gabo Arora, *Clouds Over Sidra*, for the United Nations (Figure 25), observes a twelve year old in the Za'atari camp in Jordan that is home to over 80,000 Syrian refugees. Gabo Arora described this concept as “leveraging breakthrough technologies, such as virtual reality...[to] create solidarity with those who are normally excluded and overlooked, amplifying their voices and explaining their situations.”<sup>17</sup>



Figure 25

Another work, *VICE News VR: Millions March* (Figure 26), also by the Here Be Dragons studio with artists Chris Milk and VICE creative director Spike Jonze, uses a 360-degree rig to capture the December 2014 march in New York protesting for greater police accountability. Again, by using 360-degree footage, this allows the viewer to see and feel everything that is going on in a much more truthful way than what could be

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<sup>17</sup> Milk, Chris and Gabo Arora. “The United Nations: Clouds Over Sidra.” Here Be Dragons. Dragons.org. <<http://dragons.org/creators/chris-milk/work/the-united-nations-clouds-over-sidra/>>.

seen on most media networks because nothing can be cropped out.<sup>18</sup>

My research and intent with *Urban Illusions* follows closely to the methods of *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Millions March*. By utilizing modern technology, I am able to document historically relevant events and environments to magnify the voices of residents in an American city; because of its residual segregation, these voices have gone unheard and unnoticed before. Furthermore, beyond utilizing 360-degree videos, *Urban Illusions* also incorporates 3D modeling within a video game making engine to create a unique, interactive, and engaging virtual reality experience.



Figure 26

Along with the newest works of Chris Milk and projects by Here Be Dragons, I draw influence from French filmmaker and artist, Pierre Friquet. Pierre worked with a team using 360-degree cameras to film the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake and create a live-action VR documentary titled *Vibrations* (Figures 27 & 28). The purpose of *Vibrations* was to document the disaster through a poetic journey using virtual reality in order to empathize with the community affected.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Here Be Dragons. "Chris Milk". Dragons.org. <<http://dragons.org/creators/chris-milk/work/>>. Accessed November 28, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Friquet, Pierre. "Vibrations- VR documentary." Pierrefriquet.net. <<http://pierrefriquet.net/category/vr/>>.



Figure 27



Figure 28

Many of the artists working with the 360-degree cameras are creating significant works in order to capture the reality of world problems and translating them into a virtual reality experience. Capturing these moments and formatting them into a virtual space allows for a more engaging experience in order to learn about these problems. Gabo Arora, who also helped with *Clouds Over Sidra*, created a stunning VR 360-video *My Mother's Wing*, documenting a mother's struggle and strength throughout the many tragedies happening to her home in Gaza. This VR short film takes the viewer through a thought-provoking and sympathetic journey to show the hardships happening in Gaza

and also to educate the viewer on what is going on in other parts of the world.<sup>20</sup> *Urban Illusions* is driven by that same need to educate others about what is going on in other parts of the world. It is easy to forget or become desensitized while watching the news or other forms of media, without actually being there and living those experiences, most people are can easily ignore what's happening around them. Virtual reality is a way to move beyond merely gaining sympathy for a cause by placing the participant in the shoes of someone else.

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<sup>20</sup> Arora, Gabo. "The United Nations: My Mother's Wing." Here Be Dragons. Dragons.org. <<http://dragons.org/creators/gabo-arora/work/the-united-nations-my-mothers-wing/>>.



## CONCLUSION

Virtual reality presents a unique opportunity for documenting real life in a way that is more engaging and potentially less biased than reading about it in the newspaper or watching it on the news. Often the media presents their stories in a biased perspective and do not always show the full situation. Virtual reality, especially with the help of 360-degree cameras, allows for an authentic view of all events occurring in the scene. This new form of documenting stories and events can change how history is perceived and learned. When I came across the VR works by those such as of Chris Milk and Pierre Friquet, it inspired me to look at emerging modern technologies and the capacity for humanitarian engagement and historical uses of VR to record history connected to media to expose the issues I have been most passionate about: racism and discrimination.

*Urban Illusions* as a whole has opened up an opportunity for further development. I have learned so much through this process between the software, equipment, and exploring new ways of documentation through virtual reality. It was a rewarding challenge to be able to incorporate so many emerging technologies together and still have the potential to develop this project with future technology advancements. Since I was able to get *Urban Illusions* published in the App Store, I want to expand documentation to more cities around the country and share other residents' stories. My next step is getting it released to the Google Play Store so that it can reach an audience outside of iOS users. There are also several online sources that I plan to share the Oculus Rift build on. I plan to continue developing the mobile application because I think it is important that users can be transported to different parts of the country in order to

learn, interact and empathize with communities outside of their own. The mobile application route, to me, is the most beneficial because so many people can have access to it at their fingertips. It is also an important moment in history that will be preserved for people to come back and visit anytime. Years from now, someone might want to know what it was like in Baton Rouge following the horrific July events of 2016 and because of *Urban Illusions*, they would be able to do this. I imagine using this framework to continue creating socially conscious work to preserve and document real life events in order to share them as historical context through virtual reality so others may have their own experience to learn from and form their own opinions. Ultimately, I want *Urban Illusions* to be a step in the right direction towards progress.

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## **VITA**

Haley Hatfield was born in Wichita, Kansas, in 1991. From a young age, she knew she always wanted to make work within the digital arts. In May 2014, she graduated from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in digital art. Haley made her way to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to begin her Master of Fine Arts at Louisiana State University, again concentrating in the digital arts field. She expects to graduate and receive her Master of Fine Arts degree in May of 2017.