

Visualizing Discourse: Cloud Mapping Cultural Resistance

History 150 / American Ethnic Studies 150

Seattle Central College

Dr. Jaime Cárdenas

Explanation

The assignment below allows students to utilize a relatively simple tool within the digital humanities magazine of apps. The word cloud apps are good tools for beginning practitioners of digital humanities because the rewards come easily. It gets students excited about what they can create. At another level, for some students (visual learners) there's a cognitive reward as they get to see the discourse presented in another format.¹

When I've used word clouds in my teaching, many the students have not been surprised by the technology. Word clouds are relatively commonplace on my campus (e.g., flyers for workshops or a new course, etc). Thankfully, what has captured the attention of the students is the actual "content of the content", or the text that the algorithm presents once it has run in the application. Of course, they could read the words before using the word cloud app, but the process of quantification and subsequent representation allows students to carefully notice words, words analyzed within the particular social and historical context from which the text (speech, poem, etc.) emerged. For instance the sermon that Dr. King gave against the U.S. war in southeast Asia, in 1967, is a prime example and one that I've used while teaching the US history survey: <http://tinyurl.com/mlkandvietnamwordcloud>. In this primary source, tellingly, the words "nation" and "America" are used more often than "God", but the word "world" occurs more often than all of these.

Word clouds are, more so than most other digital humanities tools, a relatively elementary data visualization medium.² Some faculty may want to use this tool at the beginning of the term. In this manner students will gain confidence and be able to build upon their digital humanities experience as they perform more complex work of interpretation through digital representation.

Introduction

¹ See Frances Miley, & Andrew Read. (2011). "Using word clouds to develop proactive learners." *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), 91-110

² For a brief discussion of the problems and possibilities of word clouds as a digital humanities tool, see Elijah Meeks, "Using Word Clouds for Topic Modeling Results", dhs.stanford.edu, <https://dhs.stanford.edu/algorithmic-literacy/using-word-clouds-for-topic-modeling-results/> (accessed 02 July 2015)

The goal of this assignment is to have you consider the discourse of race and ethnicity in a moment of resistance. In the process you will create a visual and digital representation of language and politics within the history of the USA in 1960s and 1970s.

Outcomes

After completing the assignment, each student will be able to:

- Classify basic tropes of resistance among African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian-Pacific Americans during the 1960s and 1970s
- Integrate the histories of resistance by African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian-Pacific Americans during the 1960s and 1970s
- Report on the use of language by African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian-Pacific Americans when they resisted, and negotiated with, mainstream culture in the 1960s and 1970s
- Utilize basic digital word cloud technologies

Instructions

1. Find digital versions of short articles, speeches, etc., about **cultural resistance** written by African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, or Native Americans. Each primary source should be between 500 and 5000 words.
 - a. Each cultural group should be represented by the work of one woman and one man, and so there should be a total of 8 pieces (articles, speeches, poems, etc.).
 - b. The pieces should have been published, or presented, in the years between 1965 and 1975, in the USA.
2. Answer these questions BEFORE reading the primary sources carefully and creating the word clouds:
 - a. What do you think the top 10 verbs and nouns will be in each word cloud? What makes you predict this outcome?
 - i. Please answer in a total of 500-1000 words
 - ii. Use the assigned readings, lectures, films, etc., to assist you when you write the answer.
 - iii. Use proper spelling and grammar;
 - iv. It's ok to use direct quotes; however, at least 80% of the words must be your own
 - v. Please cite your sources
3. Create a cloud map for each of the 8 works.
 - a. **To create the word clouds**, use this digital tool: <http://www.wordclouds.com/>
4. In about 600-800 words, answer this question AFTER you've created the word clouds: How did this word cloud creation change your understanding of the histories of people of color in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s?
5. Submit your work (your word clouds (PDF format) and answers to the questions) via Canvas before [insert due date here]

Resources (these will help you start the process, but there are more on the Web)

- Native Americans: <http://ucsd.libguides.com/c.php?g=90745&p=983311>
- African Americans: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesonthepize/sources/>
- Latino Americans: <http://libguides.princeton.edu/c.php?g=84133&p=541897>
- Asian/Pacific Americans: <http://guides.library.ucla.edu/c.php?g=180439&p=1185603>