Dev Report #8

After death of George Floyd, the United States saw a huge rise in BLM protests. Burch et. al (2020) documented the more than 2,000 protests that took place within the two weeks following Floyd’s death. Nebraska was no stranger to this, with documented protests in Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, Kearney, Hastings, and many Nebraska locations (Burch et. al 2020). Since the foci of the work we have done this semester has revolved around the campus and downtown areas, I focus geographically on the BLM related activity that has been happening in Lincoln, NE specifically.

Like Risam (2020), I aim to resist the notion of a single story. Instead, I embrace the ways that digital projects should “include collaboration with communities represented in or affected by its concerns” (Risam 2020). While BLM and COVID19 seem like largely unrelated issues, the truth is, just as police violence has disproportionately affected black people, so has COVID19. The Pew Research Center shows “that Black Americans have been hospitalized with COVID-19 at higher rates than other racial or ethnic groups” (Horowitz 2020). Like many other aspects of humanity, those most effected are usually those most disenfranchised. As such, a digital project about the effects of COVID19 on Lincoln, NE should not ignore the realities of its black citizens.

Here’s a quick brief of the BLM activity that happened in Lincoln, NE this summer. Protests marches in Lincoln, NE began on May 29th and continued well throughout August. Most began in centralized downtown locations and moved toward the Capitol (McConnell 2020). However, as protests continued, they spread to different areas of Lincoln, from the South 27th St. (Ferriera 2020) to the Indian Center on Military Rd. (Kleeb 2020). Throughout the summer, a curfew was both lifted and raised, just as protestors were met with both tension and ease in equal measures (Wolgamott and Saric). An important note: Nebraska protestors weren’t just marching for George Flyod, but also for James Scurlock, an Omaha native who was killed during one of the first nights of protest (Kleeb 2020).

During this time, a group of teenage activists founded they Black Leaders Movement with the mission that, “through education and activism, we are bringing awareness to privilege, fighting discrimination and dismantling systemic racism” (“Join the Black Leaders Movement in Lincoln, Nebraska”). Most of the education and activist work that this group does happens across the multiple digital platforms – FB, Twitter, Instagram, etc…Both readings for this week critique the ways that most DH work related in Black Studies is merely recovery work, a product of cultural production; “it leads us to digitize Black culture, but not to use it in service of dismantling racist systems that contain and constrain freedom for Black bodies” (Noble 2019).

While this cultural production mode may produce projects like Colored Conventions, focusing on black digital humanities work as it happens can be more powerful. Gallon (2019) offers that “a black epistemology will generate questions about the relationship between the racialization of humanity and the digital as power, ultimately fostering new inquiries and deeper understandings about the human condition” (Gallon 2019). As such, we should turn to the digital work that the Black Leaders Movement is doing and emphasis the ways it is dismantling oppressive forces – right now. While many us spent summers in solitude, fearful of COVID19, these young activists were in the streets of Lincoln, fighting off both the oppressive forces of the pandemic and police brutality. Our narratives need to both include and uplift their voices, if we ever want to produce a COVID19 story of Lincoln, NE that isn’t just a single story.

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