

Analyzing Black Abolitionist Rhetoric, 1830-1861

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Comm-313 Presentation



Project questions

1. A Case Study | Is computerized text analysis a beneficial methodology for historical research?
2. Contribution to the literature | How did Black abolitionist writings and sermons develop between 1830 and 1861, the eve of the Civil War?
 - More civil rights focused? More Demanding?

Data Source

- **What is the data?** ~750 Black abolitionist texts from the antebellum era.
- **Where is it coming from?** University of Detroit Mercy's online archive, i.e. out of their 1,800 documents, ~750 are PDFs
- **How was it collected?** Web scraping (thanks Jake <3)
- **How was it structure?** Pre-1840 and post-1840.

One Finding So Far

- **Hypothesis, building on the literature** | Black abolitionist arguments became more focused on civil rights, not just human rights after 1840.
- **Findings** | Hypothesis confirmed.

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TRIGRAMS: [('the united states', 358), ('in this country', 177), ('of the united', 173), ('one of the', 168), ('of the slave', 140), ('in the united', 135), ('the cause of', 122), ('of the country', 120), ('as well as', 115), ('the people of', 114), ('the black man', 114), ('of the american', 113), ('he did not', 108), ('the colored people', 104), ('the coloured people', 91), ('i do not', 91), ('of the colored', 88), ('the colored man', 88), ('of the free', 86), ('of the world', 86), ('of the most', 86), ('the state of', 85), ('that he was', 85), ('the history of', 85), ('people of the', 84)]
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TRIGRAMS: [('people of color', 56), ('the cause of', 55), ('the people of', 54), ('the united states', 53), ('committee of vigilance', 40), ('of the colored', 39), ('the rights of', 33), ('of the people', 33), ('the colonization society', 32), ('the colored man', 32), ('one of the', 31), ('the colored american', 31), ('in relation to', 29), ('of the committee', 29), ('the libel suit', 28), ('in this country', 27), ('the spirit of', 26), ('in behalf of', 26), ('as well as', 25), ('of the american', 25), ('of the most', 24), ('in the united', 24), ('relation to the', 23), ('of the free', 23), ('some of the', 22)]
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In [61]: print('the united states in pre:', trigram_dist['the united states']*6)
         print('the united states in post:', trigram_dist_post['the united states'])
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the united states in pre: 318
the united states in post: 358
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Next Steps of Analysis

- Keyness analysis – increasing nationalist vocabulary?
Changing self identification?
- Sentiment analysis scores – increasing demanding and aggressive tone?