



Rage, Regret, and Resignation:

A Psycho-linguistic Analysis of Inmates' Last Statements

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OUTLINE

Introduction

- *Psycholinguistic theories of last words*

- *Why take an inductive approach?*

Methods

- *The Dataset*

- *Topic Modelling*

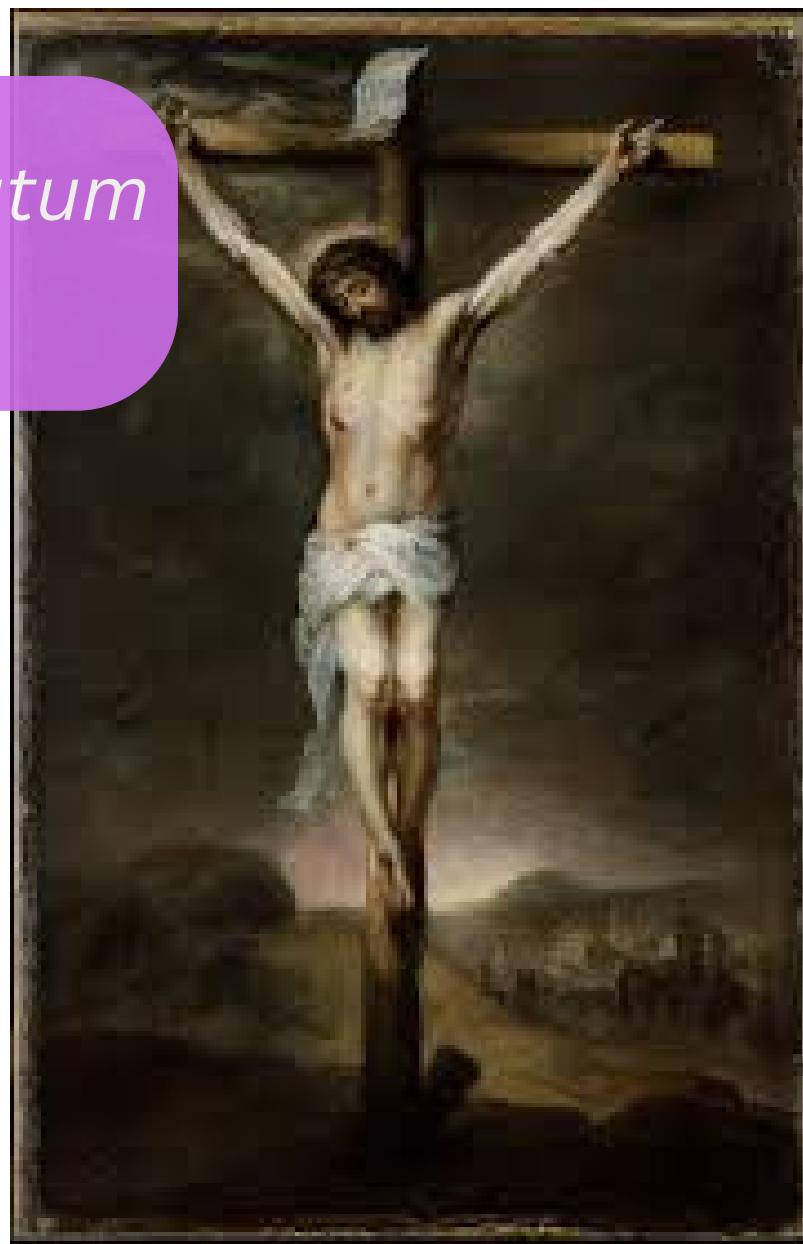
Results

- *Rage, Resignation, Regret, Repentance and Resistance*

- *Topic Modelling by Race*

Humans have been fascinated with last words for as long as capital punishment has existed

*“Consummatum
Est”*



*“Aaghyyyy, aray, sakit
naman!”*

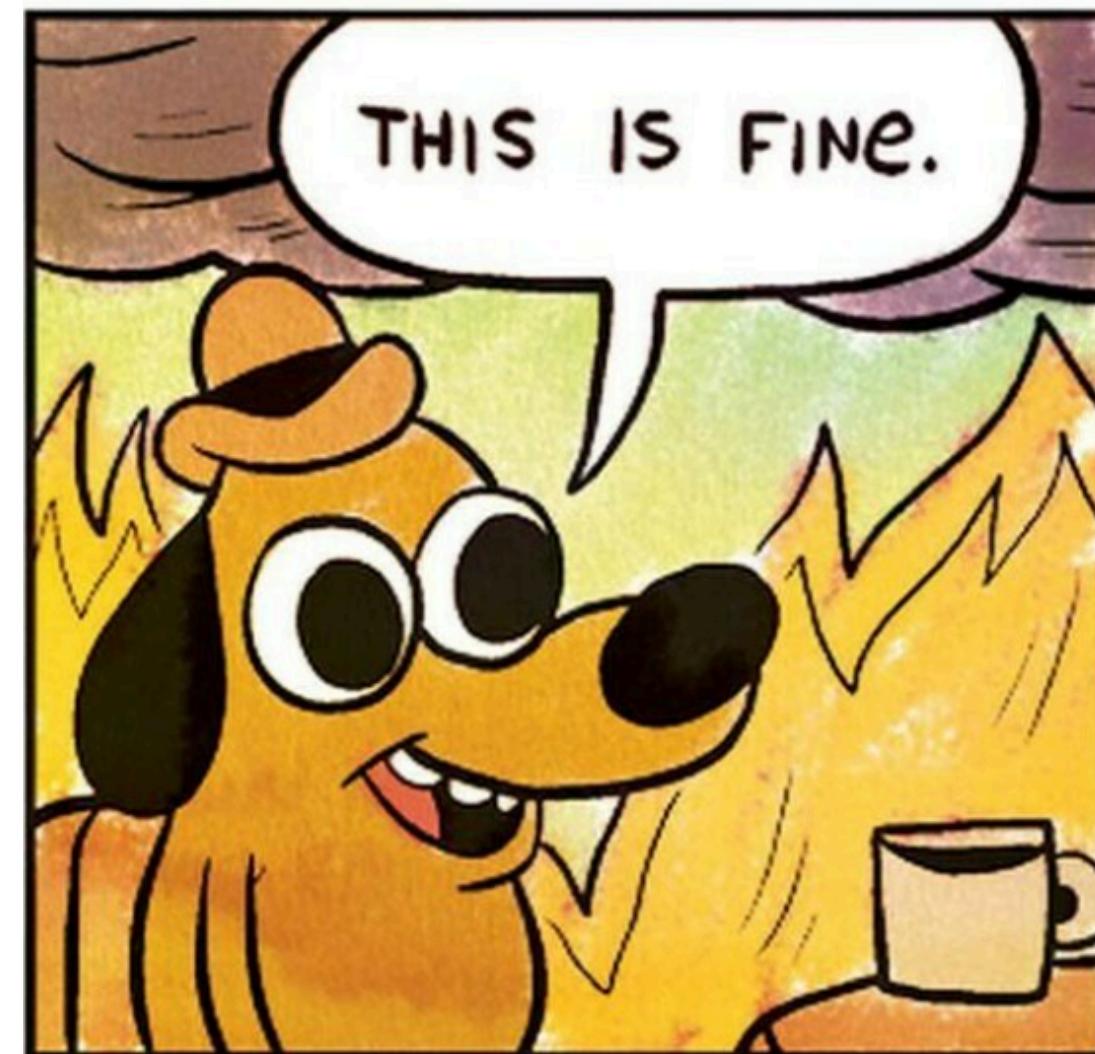


There have been many attempts to explain the psycholinguistics of last words

Terror Management Theory

Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986)

- Last words grant the convicted a final chance to **assert agency** over their death and **recover their sense of self-esteem**
- Invoked by Hirschmuller and Egloff (2016) in their LIWC-based approach to the Texas Inmates Dataset





Dramaturgical Theory

- Executions are a kind of *ritual* with the convict as the *sacrifice*
- Rizza (2014) invoked Huizinga's concept of the *language of play* – inmates often sing, recite poetry, quote films/novels, and even make jokes of their execution

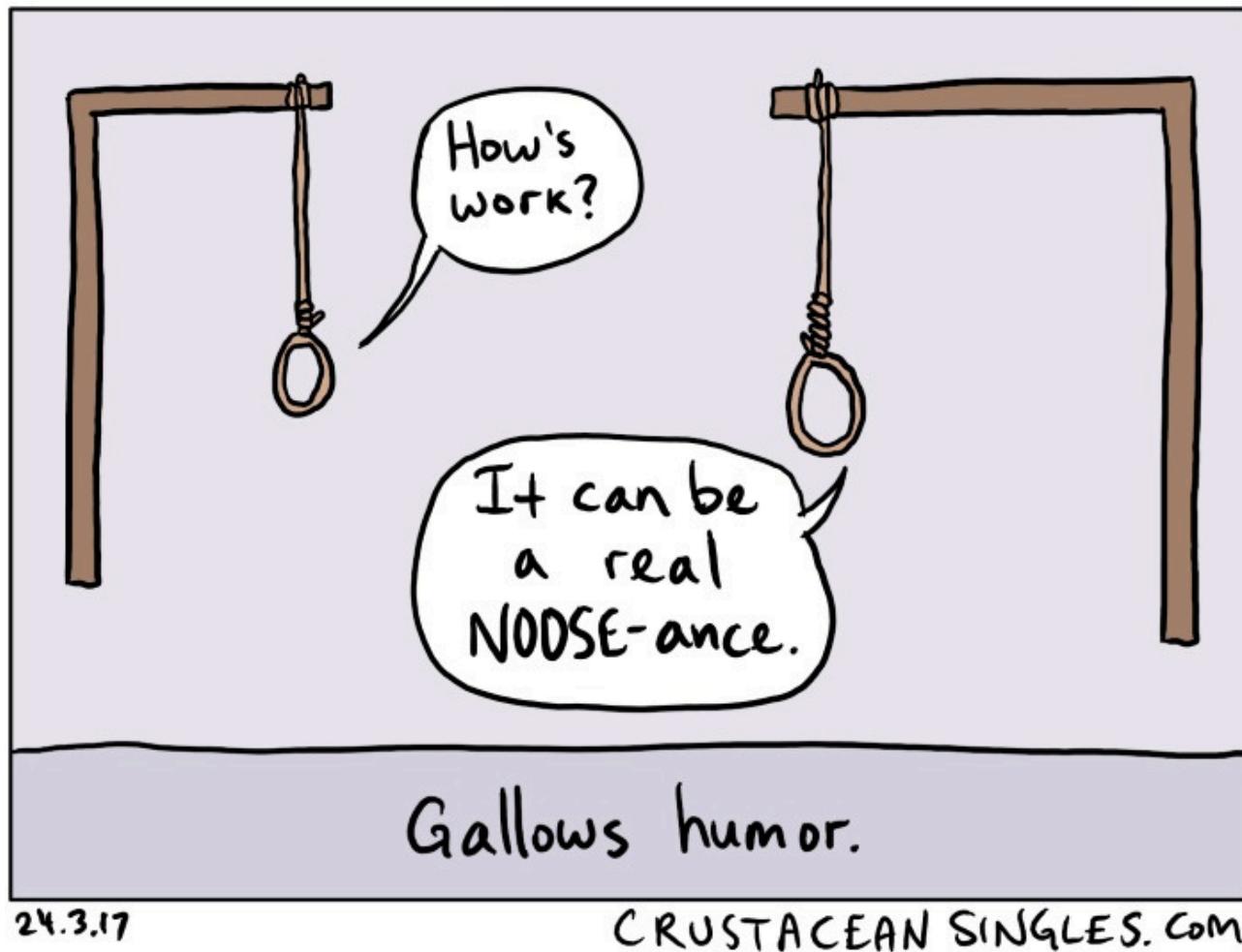
Last Words as Meaning-Making

- Last words are an attempt to *make sense* of their situation
- Meaning is (re)constructed and varies depending on how the individual interprets the adversity they face



when the opps
try to end me but
i'm just a chill guy

But what do inmates actually say?



There are (as far as we know) fairly few studies that have taken an *inductive* approach to the study of last words

Further, few studies have attempted to connect the contents of final statements to inmates' *lived experiences* (e.g. what role do race, education, or geography play?)

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Dataset



- Texas, by far, executes more people than any other state
- Since 1982, the TDCJ has been recording the last words of death row inmates (along with other demographic information including **race** and **years of schooling**)
- The full dataset contains a record of 591 inmates
 - Cleanest version on Kaggle is only up to 2017, newer records were scraped from the TDCJ website

*Inmates can opt out of giving a recorded statement

Overview of Methods



Entire TDCJ Dataset

- Word frequency analysis
- Topic modeling via LDA



Broken down by demographic

- Do the topics differ?
- Are there new *subtopics* or different articulations of the same theme?

Initial Results | Dominance of “positive” language

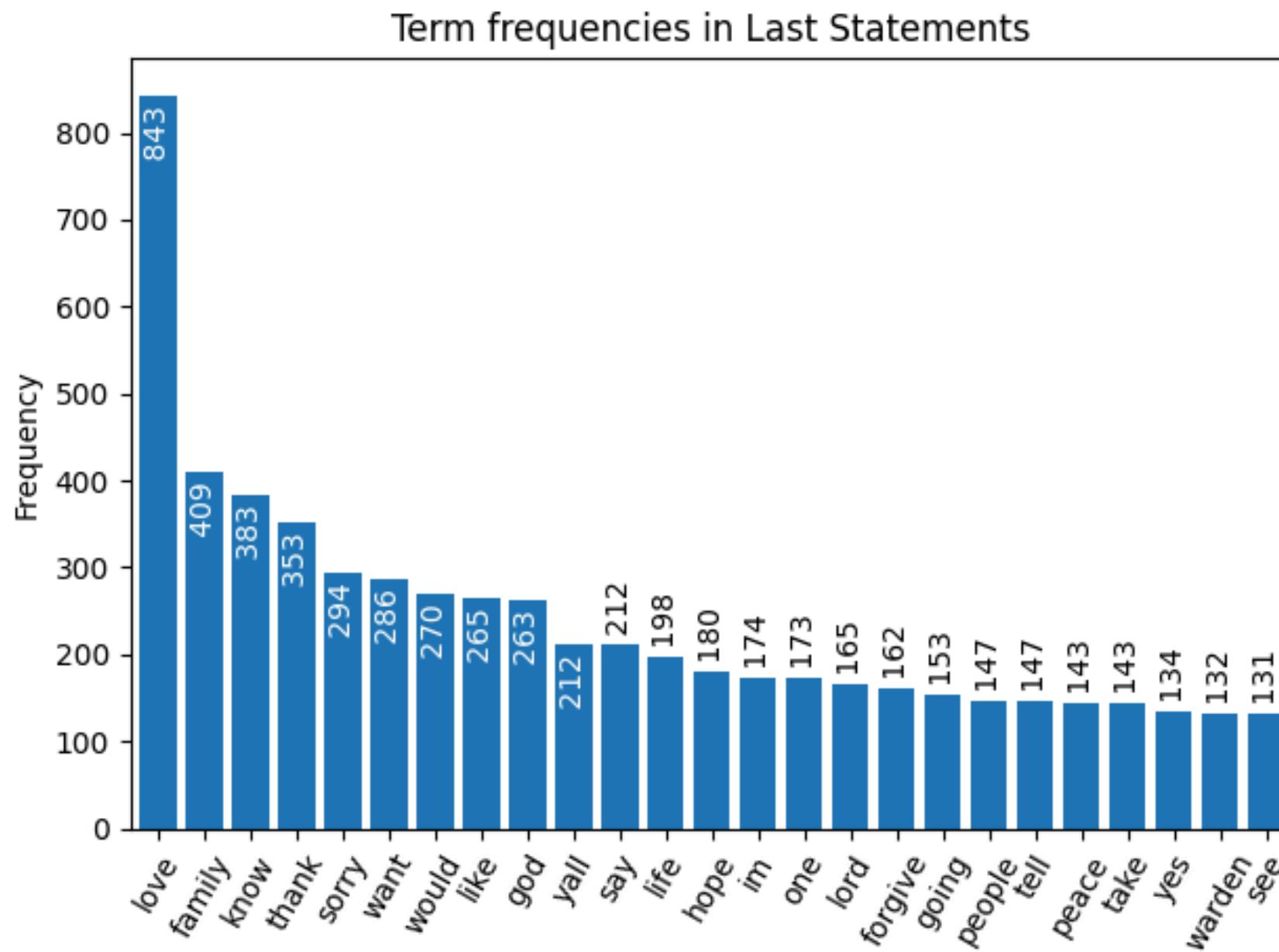


Fig 1. Frequencies of top 25 words

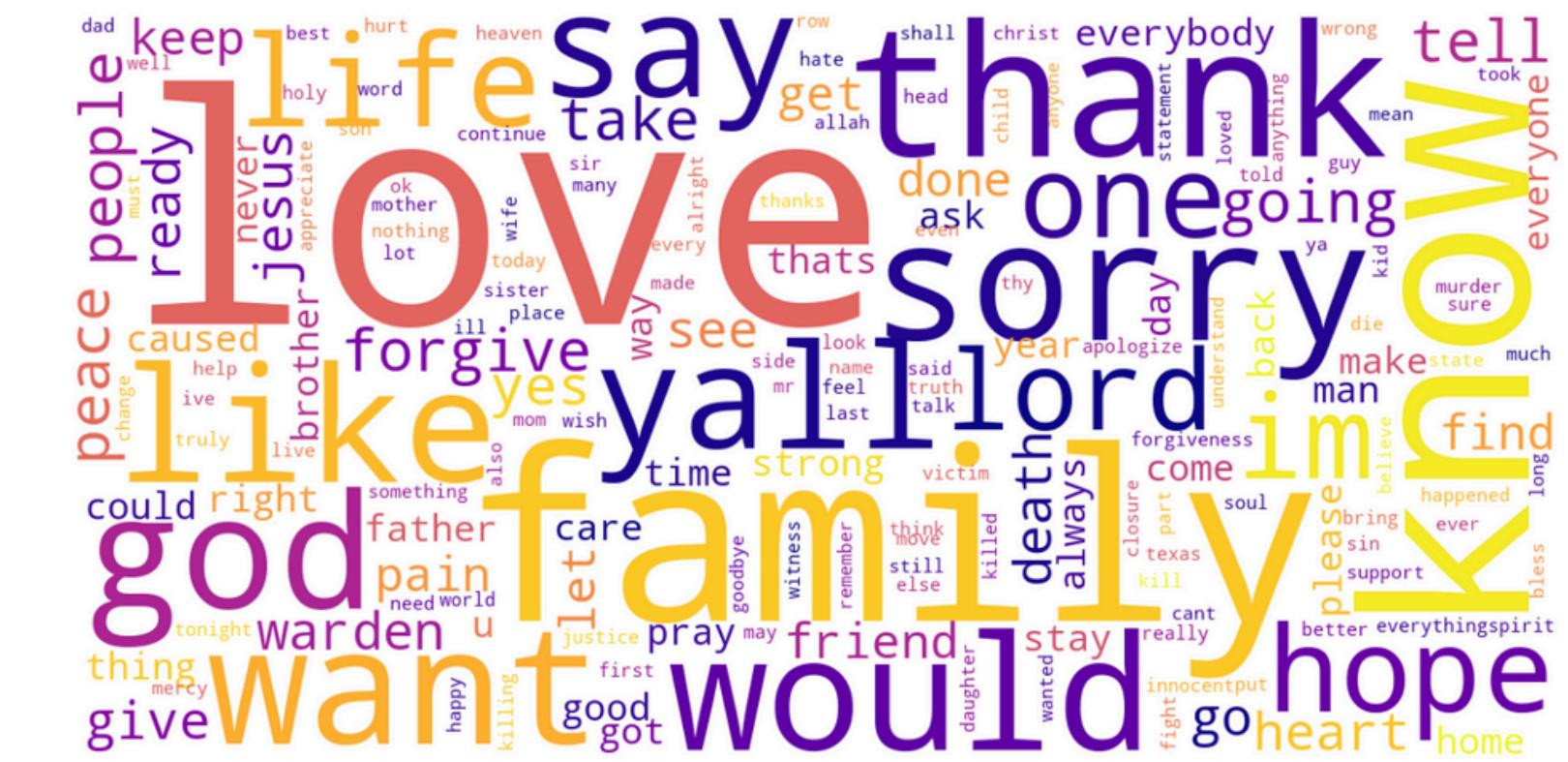


Fig 2. TDCJ Wordcloud

Without the inclusion of words like “warden”, it would be difficult to tell what dataset this is from

Initial Results | LDA Topic Modelling

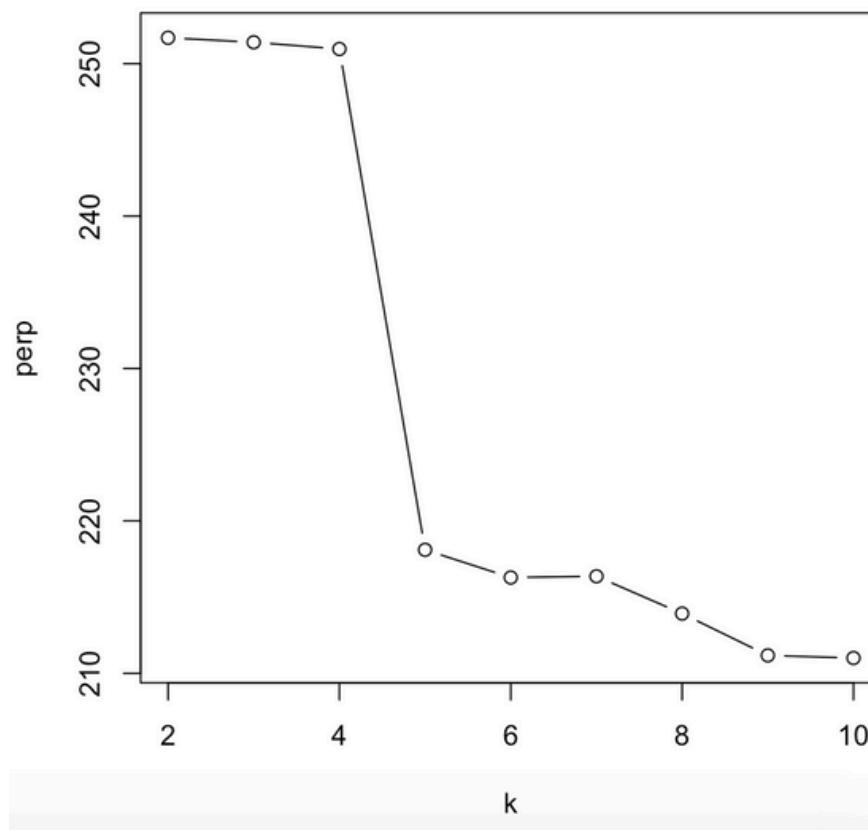


Fig 3. Elbow method suggest 5 clusters

Topic 1: say, like, now, one, people, death, life, will, time, don('t), said, row, allah, get, right, justice, never, world, think, statement

Topic 2: love, want, know, thank, tell, going, ready, warden, yes, everybody, see, mom, take, didn('t), care, just, everyone, everything, life

Topic 3: family, sorry, hope, like, peace, can, thank, pain, find, just, will, caused, friends, heart, apologize, know, say, forgive

Topic 4: god, lord, jesus, forgive, ask, love, will, father, thank, life, christ, please, forgiveness, bless, heaven, home

Topic 5: love, will, keep, strong, know, stay, always, don('t), let, innocent, people, man, get, kill, continue, brothers, make, murder

Our Interpretations

RAGE

say, like, now, one, people, death, life, will, time, don('t), said, row, allah, get, right, justice, never, world, think, statement

RESIGNATION

love, want, know, thank, tell, going, ready, warden, yes, everybody, see, mom, take, didn('t), care, just, everyone, everything, life

REGRET

family, sorry, hope, like, peace, can, thank, pain, find, just, will, caused, friends, heart, apologize, know, say, forgive

RELIGION

god, lord, jesus, forgive, ask, love, will, father, thank, life, christ, please, forgiveness, bless, heaven, home

RESISTANCE

love, will, keep, strong, know, stay, always, don('t), let, innocent, people, man, get, kill, continue, brothers, make, murder

Sample Texts | Rage

525

This execution is not justice. This execution is an act of revenge! If this is justice, then justice is blind. Take a borderline retarded young male who for the 1st time ever in his life committed a felony then contaminate his TRUE tell all confession add a judge who discriminates plus an ALL-WHITE JURY pile on an ineffective assistance of counsel and execute the option of rehabilitation persecute the witnesses and you have created a death sentence for a family lasting over 10 years. I will say once again.....*This execution isn't justice – but an act of revenge.....*

591

I, at this very moment, have absolutely no fear of what may happen to this body. My fear is for Allah, God only, who has at this moment the **only power to determine if I should live or die...**

322

The act I committed to put me **here was not just heinous, it was senseless.** But the person that committed that act is no longer here - I am. I'm not going to struggle physically against any restraints. I'm not going to shout, use profanity or make idle threats.....**This conflict hurts us all, there are no SIDES. The people who support this proceeding think this is justice. The people that think that I should live think that is justice.** As difficult as it may seem, this is a clash of ideals, with both parties committed to what they feel is right. But who's wrong if in the end we're all victims? In my heart, I have to believe that there is a peaceful compromise to our ideals. I don't mind if there are for me, as long as there are for those who are yet to come.....No one wins tonight. No one gets closure. No one walks away victorious

Sample Texts | Resignation

131

*Yes, I want to start off by saying to everyone know that's involved in this atrocity that they are all forgiven by me. Mom, I love you.....(crying) **I am ready to go Warden.** Coming home dad, coming home dad.*

38

*Thank you I love you all. Sandra, nice meeting you. I Love ya'll. It's all good. I'm not the one that killed Christina, so **whatever makes ya'll happy.** I love ya'll. I'll see you on the other side. Ya'll be good. OK Warden I'm ready*

158

*Yes sir, I want to tell my mom that I love her and thank her for everything that she has done for me. Tell my sister that I love her too thank her for everything that she has done for me. I hope you can move on after this. **I'll be fine. I'll be O.K.** I love you too. I love you too. Take care O.K. That's all I have to say Warden. Thank you sir.*

Sample Texts | Regret

69

*I would like **to apologize to the Moreno family** and the Steinfeldt family for all of the trouble I have caused them. I would like to apologize to my family for all of the trouble that I have caused them. I would also like to thank my family for all of their support. I guess that's it.*

1

*Yes ma'am, first I would like to **apologize for all the wrong I have done**, \nand for pain I've caused to the Edwards family. I regret, I apologize, and \nl pray that you can find peace, comfort and closer in your heart for the Thank you \nand I pray, that's it Warden.*

163

*Yes, nothing I can say can change the past. **I am asking for forgiveness**. Saying sorry is not going to change anything. I hope one day you can find peace. I am sorry for all of the pain that I have caused you for all those years. There is nothing else I can say, that can help you. Mija, I love you. Sis, Cynthia, and Sandy, keep on going and it will be O.K. I am sorry to put you through this as well. I can't change the past. I hope you find peace and know that I love you. I am sorry. I am sorry and I can't change it.*

Initial Results | *Topic Modeling by Race Demographic*

N = 170



Fig 4a. Word cloud of Black Race Demographic

N = 202

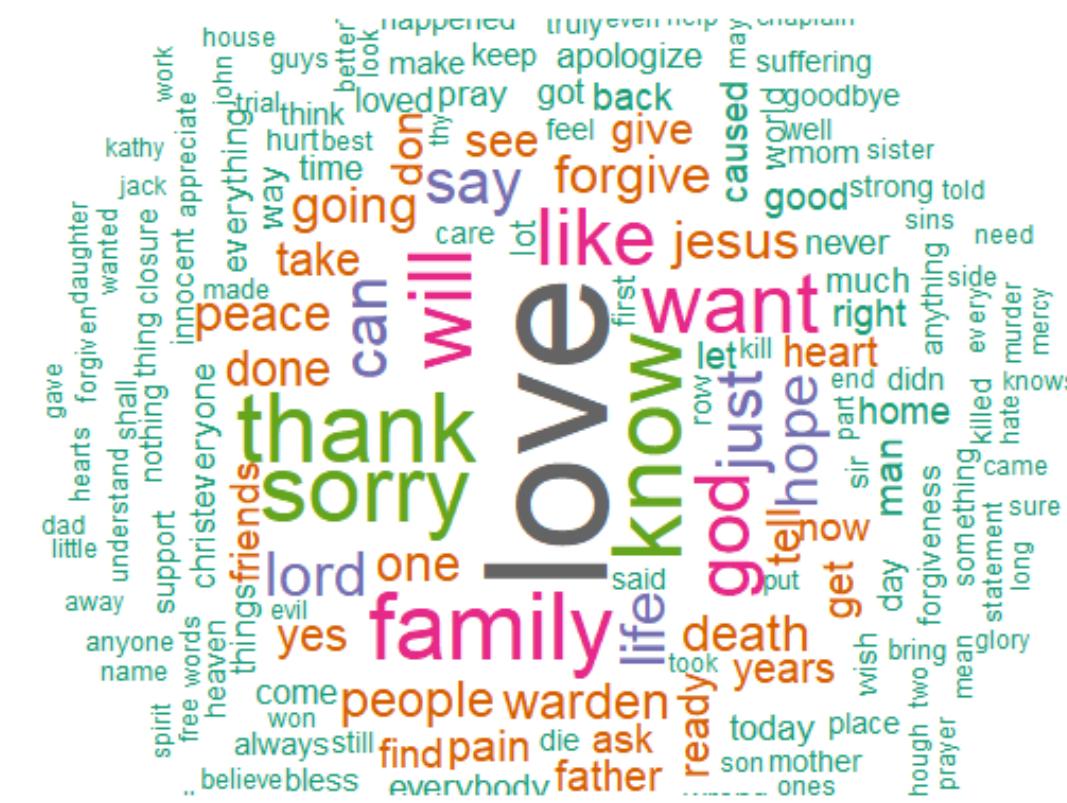


Fig 4b. Word cloud of White Race Demographic

N = 94

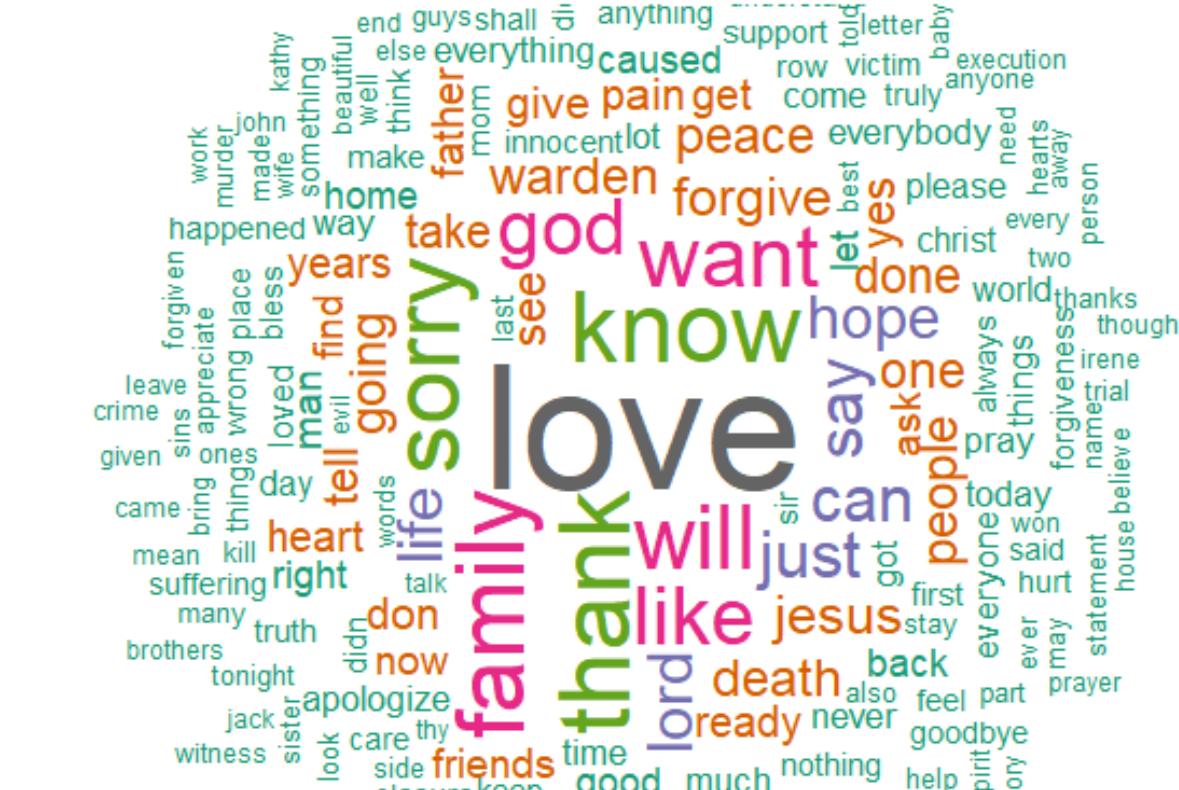
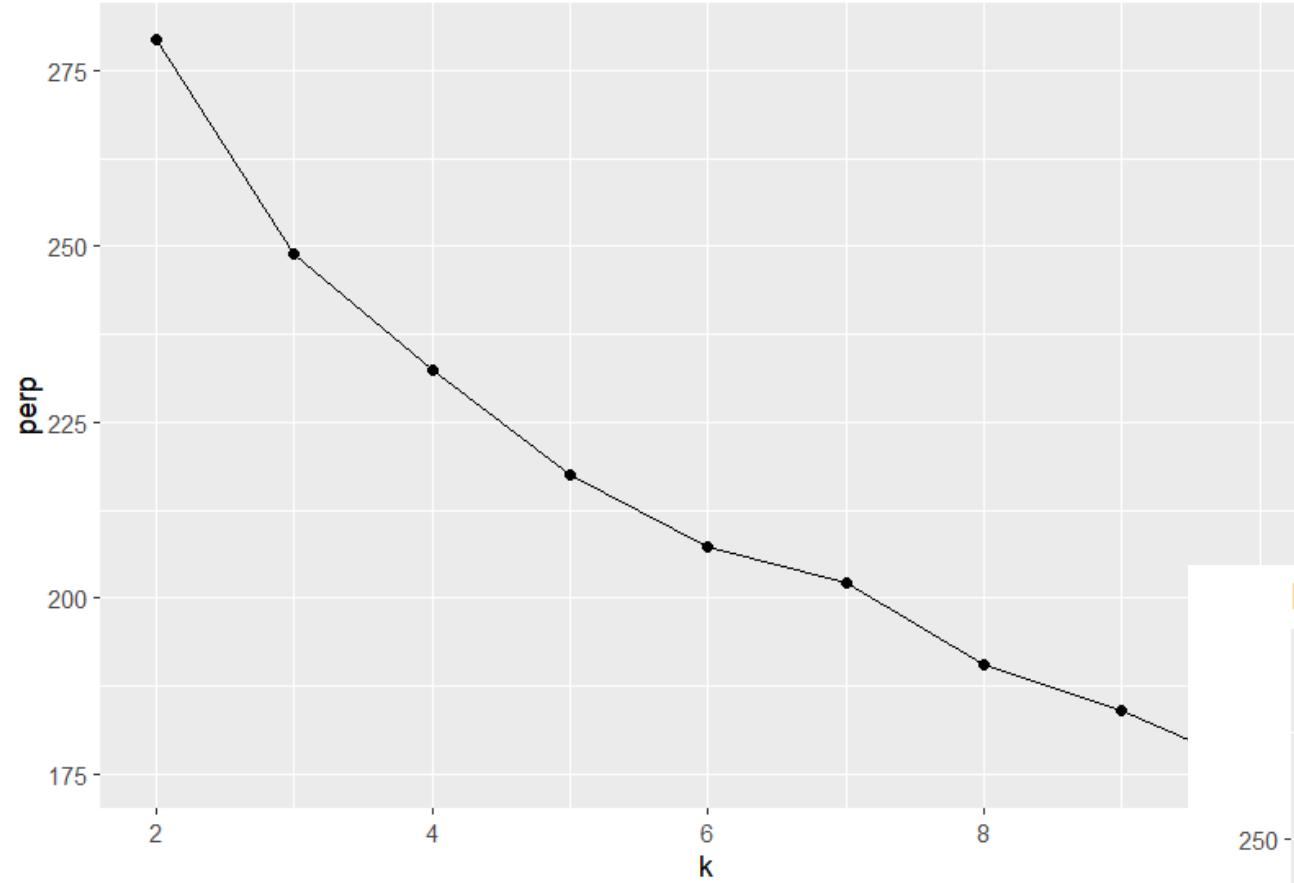


Fig 4c. Word cloud of Hispanic Race Demographic

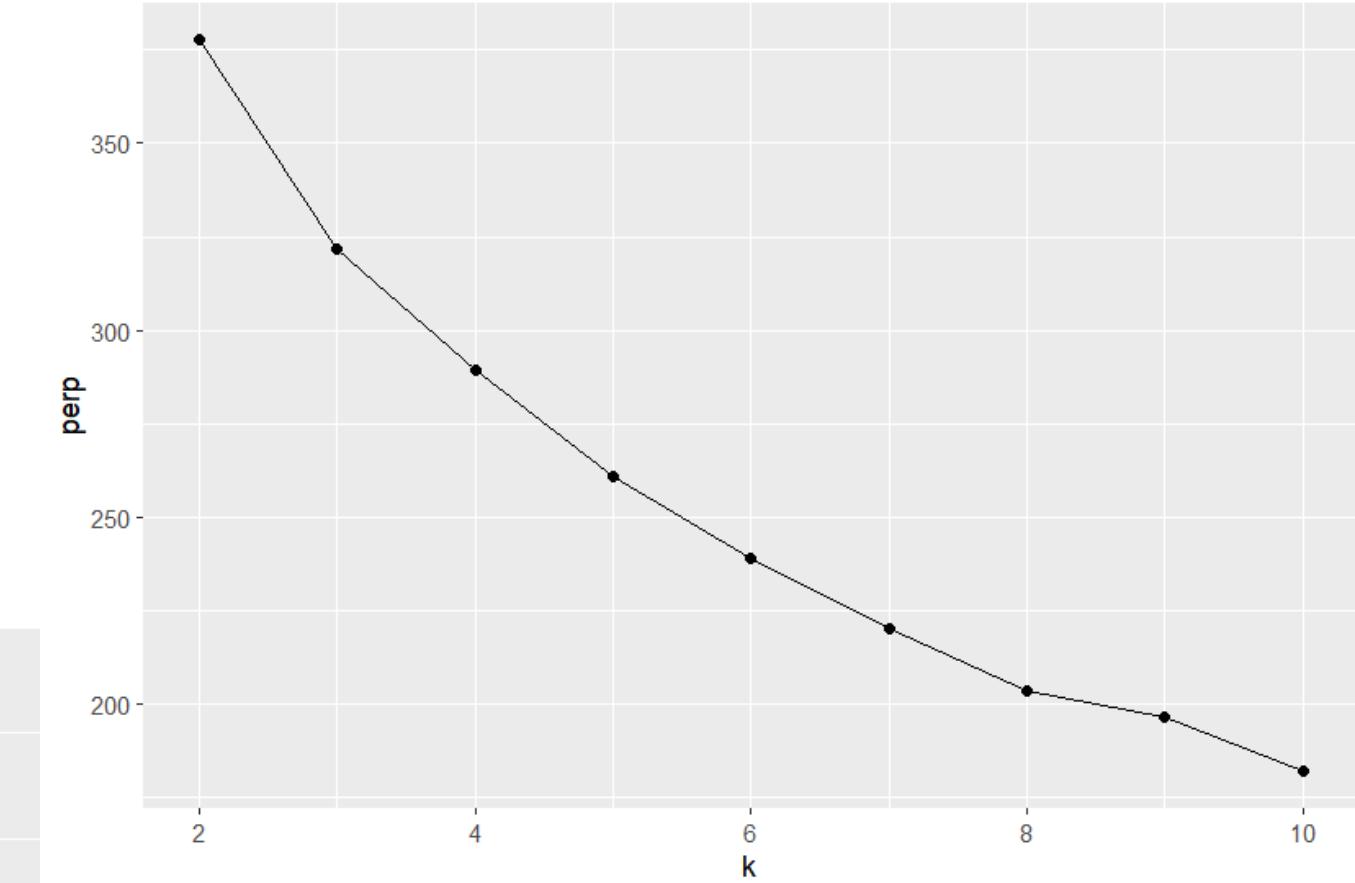
Positive words and emotions are mostly conveyed across 3 major race demographic, as well as involved parties such as the *family*, *victims*, and *God*.

Initial Results | Topic Modeling by Race Demographic

Perplexity Plot for Race with Specifications: Black



Perplexity Plot for Race with Specifications: Hispanic



Perplexity Plot for Race with Specifications: White

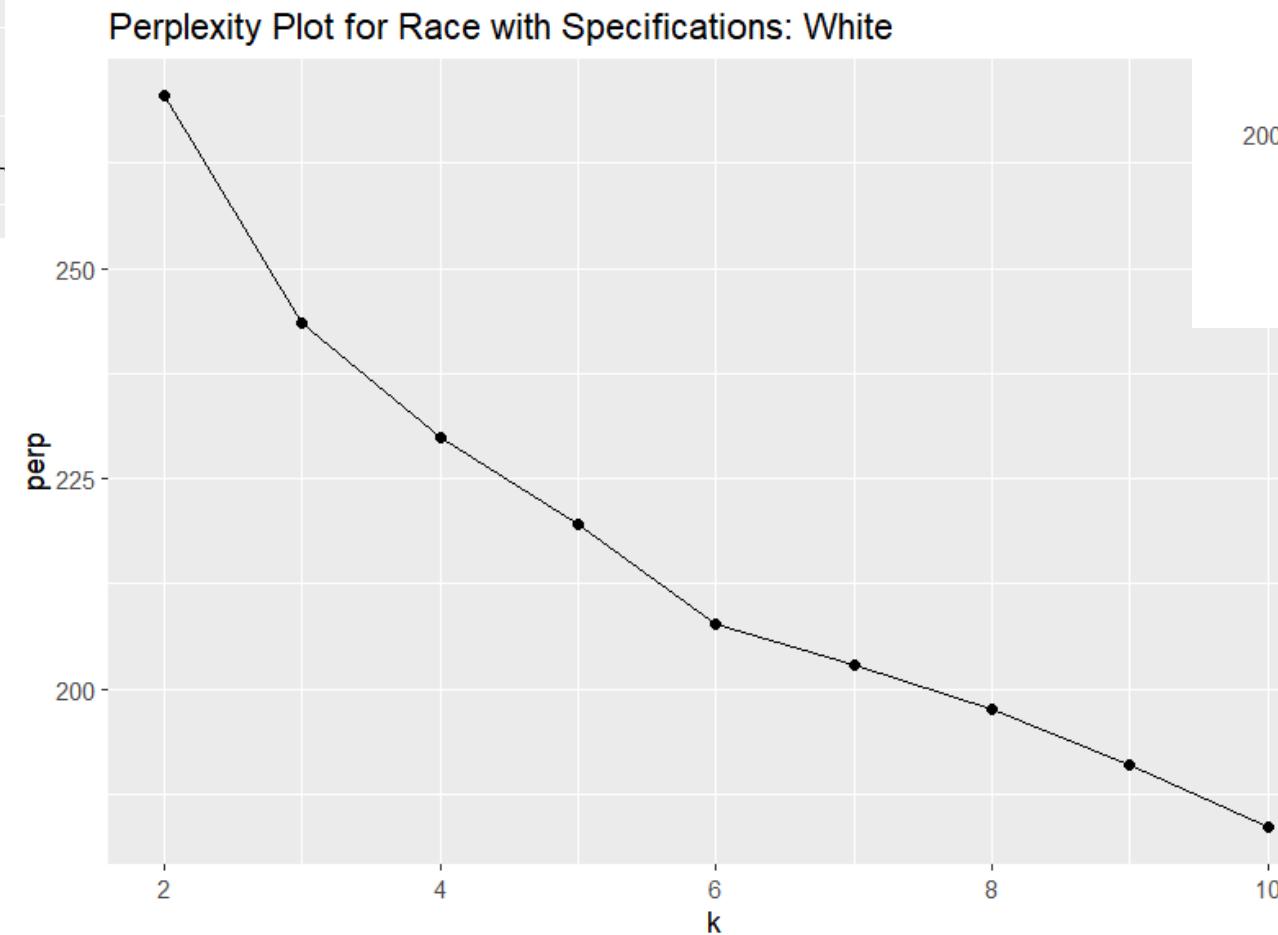


Fig 5a, 5b, 5c.

Elbow method suggests $k = 3$
clusters for each race
demographic

Initial Results | Topic Modelling by Race Demographic

Black



Retrospection



Recognition



Respect

White



Retrospection



Religion



Respect

Hispanic



Repentance



Religion



Retrospection

Sample Words and Texts | Black

RETROSPECTION

1 love, **family**, thank,
like, god, **sorry**,
forgive, know, will,
hope, **lord**

To the Davis family, **I am sorry for all of the pain that I caused your family**. It was me and me alone. Anthony Graves had nothing to do with it. I lied on him in court. My wife had nothing to do with it. Anthony Graves don't even know anything about it. **My wife don't know anything about it**. But, I hope that you can find your peace and comfort in strength in Christ Jesus alone. Like I said, **I am sorry for hurting your family**. And it is a shame that it had to come to this. **So I hope that you don't find peace, not in my death, but in Christ...**

RECOGNITION

2 will, love, keep, people,
must, **continue**, **death**,
forward, know, **tonight**,
black

I would like to say that I did not kill Bobby Lambert. **That I'm an innocent black man that is being murdered**. **This is a lynching that is happening in America tonight**. There's overwhelming and compelling evidence of my defense that has never been heard in any court of America. What is happening here is an outrage for any civilized country to anybody anywhere to look at what's happening here is wrong. I thank all of the people that have rallied to my cause. **They've been standing in support of me...Keep moving forward, my brothers**. **Slavery couldn't stop us... We will not stop us tonight. We will go forward.**

RESPECT

3 love, **know**, want, don,
say, **family**, just, like,
one, **life**, sorry, going,
didn't

First, I want to let my mom know not to cry, **there is no reason to cry**, everybody dies. Everybody has their time, don't worry about me. I'm strong. **To my family: my old man, my kids, daddy is sorry**. I love each and every one of you. I'll be looking for you. To my wife, I love you. **The last two years have been the best...**

Moving Forward

1.) Storylining

2.) Clustering by years of education

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