

Visualizing Testimony in Text

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Artifact type: Assignment

Developed for: Upper-level undergraduate seminar on mapping narratives of formerly enslaved people

Audience: History majors and non-majors with previous history coursework

Time required: 90 minutes in class plus out-of-class work

Method and tool: Text analysis and visualization with Voyant

Description:

This assignment builds on background reading that students would have completed for the course, both secondary (such as Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* and Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*) and primary (including narratives of formerly enslaved people and WPA Federal Writers Project interviews). Students use the narratives compiled at the University of North Carolina's *Documenting the American South* project (<https://docsouth.unc.edu/>) as a source base for textual analysis using Voyant. The course centers on researching and creating a HistoryPin-based interactive map of formerly enslaved people's narratives. By integrating Voyant as a very different form of visualization, or mapping, students are able to see how their own mapping approach is manipulating their end product, as well as working with the genre conventions of the narratives that Smith Foster's work highlights. Students familiarize themselves with Voyant in class and work, out of class, to produce several visualizations that compare the narrative that they have chosen to research for the semester with the larger *Documenting the American South* set of texts. They select one of the visualizations made with Voyant to include in their final Prezi and related HistoryPin project on their chosen narrative. In class, students peer review their visualization choices and discuss the impact of their text visualizations. The students are evaluated upon initial submission of their assignment (as a Prezi node), receive feedback, and then are evaluated a second time when the revised version of their Prezi node is integrated into their larger Prezi and HistoryPin project.

Supporting materials:

Assignment

Visualizing Testimony in Text

HIST 471

Mapping Slavery: Narrative, Cartography, and Digital Approaches

Fall 2020

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Due: Beginning of class, Week 7

Goals:

- Understand non-cartographic ways of visualizing the narratives of formerly enslaved people
- Understand both “testimony” and “genre” as overlapping ways of reading and understanding the narratives of formerly enslaved people
- Integrate text visualization into your chronological (Prezi/TimelineJS) and cartographic (HistoryPin) projects

Method:

In Class, Week 5:

- Follow “Using Voyant” handout directions to upload the DocSouth .txt collection of narratives (available on Moodle, under Week 5)
- Use Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* (especially Chapter 5) to analyze genre and plot through Voyant visualizations of narratives
 - Experiment with using at least six and exporting at least four different kinds of Voyant visualizations based on the DocSouth sample
 - Compare results with at least one other student
 - Discuss why some of your visualizations using the same tools and sources appear different (think back to readings on algorithms)
- Share at least one of your visualizations as part of seminar discussion on genre/plot/mapping

For assignment, on your own:

- Replace the DocSouth sample with only your chosen narrative and run/export the same visualizations
- Use Smith Foster to analyze plot and genre in your chosen narrative
- Integrate at least one of your visualizations into your Prezi/TimelineJS project on your chosen narrative
- Outline in a Word/Google Doc (250-500 words) how you will use text visualization in your final HistoryPin interactive map and how the text visualization will complement the cartographic visualization. This plan and justification does not need to be thesis-driven, but should help the reader understand how you plan to connect text visualization to the larger goals of your course project.

In class, Week 7:

- Break into groups of 3 and use the provided peer-review rubric to give feedback on your group members’ Prezi nodes
- Discuss feedback in groups and come up with one strategy for using text visualization in Prezi to share with the class (also have a backup idea in case yours is taken by another group)
- As a class, we will come up with a working guide (via Google Docs) to using text visualization in Prezi

-We will use this guide, along with your submitted plan/justifications, as a basis for discussion in future classes for how to move text visualization approaches from Prezi and chronological focuses to HistoryPin and cartographic focuses.

Submission:

- Week 5, in class: upload one visualization to course Google Drive for discussion
- Week 7 submit via Moodle:
 - One Prezi node (can be screenshot or in separate presentation) using text visualization of your chosen narrative
 - 250-500 word Word/Google Doc plan for text visualization in HistoryPin
- Week 13 submit via Moodle: link to full draft of HistoryPin presentation that includes at least one text visualization (Note: this is graded as part of HistoryPin draft, not Visualizing Testimony assignment)
- Week 15 submit via Moodle: link to full and final draft of HistoryPin presentation that includes at least one text visualization (Note: this is graded as part of HistoryPin draft, not Visualizing Testimony assignment)

Evaluation:

- Visualizing Testimony assignment is worth 5% of your final grade, with the text visualizations due as part of Week 13 and 15 HistoryPin submissions graded as part of those assignments (10% and 25% of your final grade, respectively)
- For the Visualizing Testimony grade, you will be assessed in the following manner, all based on our course rubric for historical writing:
 - 50% Prezi Node
 - Is the text visualization the focus of the node?
 - Is the text visualization used analytically rather than as an illustration?
 - How well does the text visualization help the viewer better understand how the author worked in the context of a genre, while also providing “virtual witnessing”?
 - How well does the text visualization engage with the DocSouth works, in addition to the single narrative?
 - 50% HistoryPin planning and justification
 - Does the document clearly and concisely outline how and why text visualization will be used in the HistoryPin project?
 - How well does the document integrate text visualization into the cartographic focus of the HistoryPin project?
 - Is the text visualization used to make points that HistoryPin could not otherwise make?