



# The Underlying Emotions Driving Social Protest

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William Bishop, Michigan State University  
Dr. Antoine Banks, University of Maryland College Park  
Neil Lund, University of Maryland College Park



Government and Politics Department

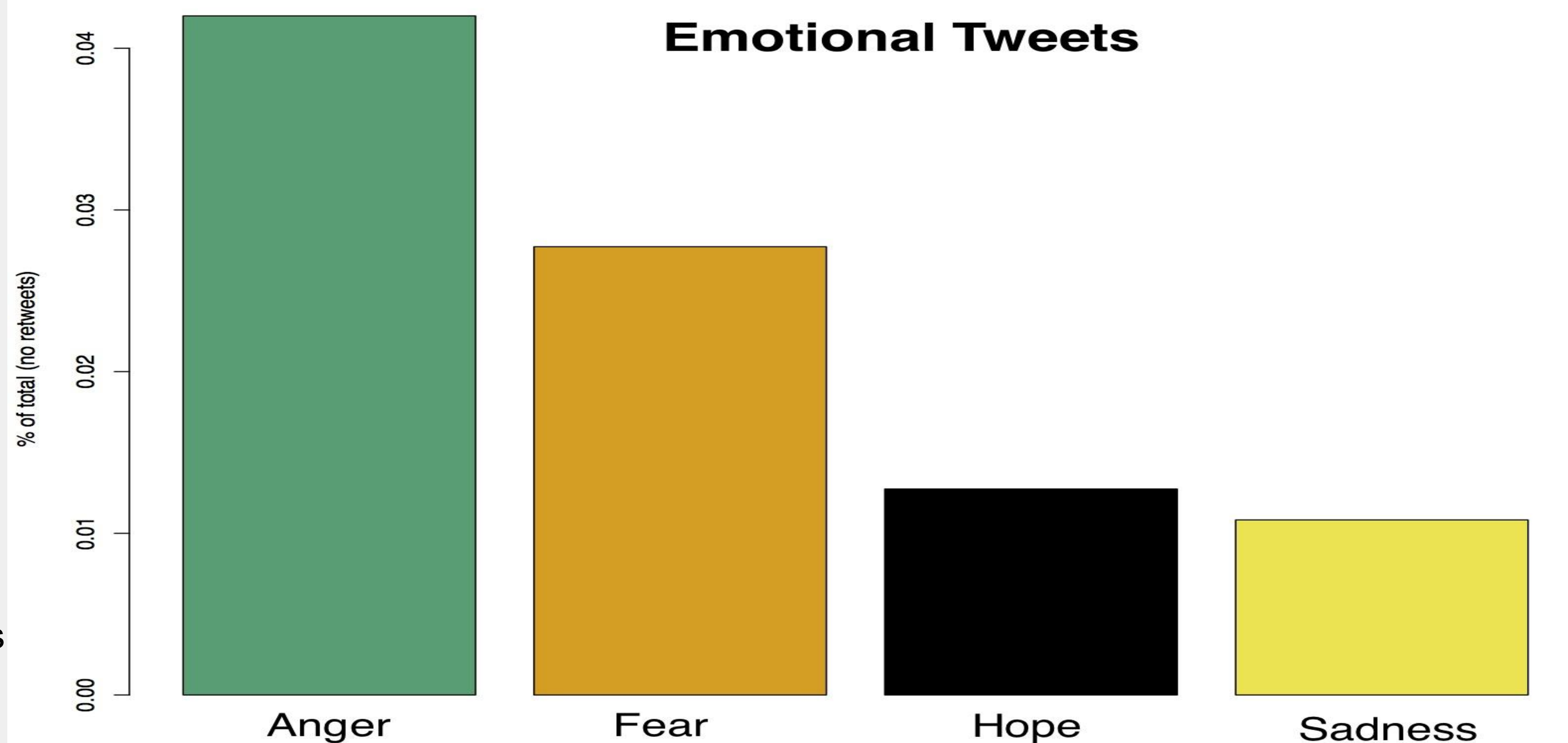
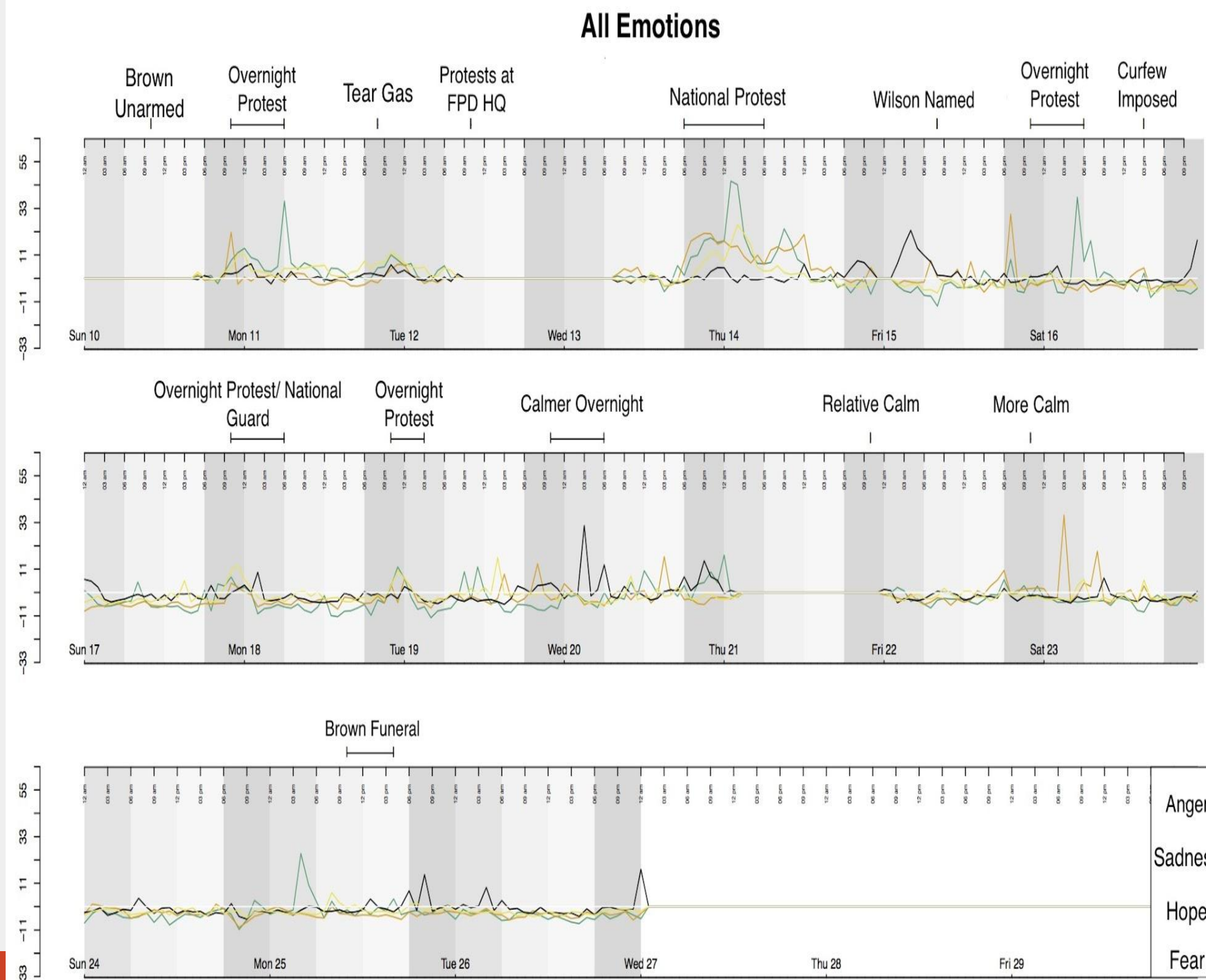
## Introduction

- Recently, we have seen a new wave of social protest and progressive movements fighting to end police brutality and achieve racial and sexuality equality (Rickford 2016).
- Dissatisfaction with the abuse of police power has put focus on the function of police in America. On August 9th, 2014, unarmed 18 year old Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri.
- Ferguson sparked a national debate about the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement.
- One of the most powerful groups emerging from this new wave of activism is the Black Lives Matter Movement.
- While research shows that organizational strength plays a role in the emergence of black progressive movements (McAdams 1982), we wanted to examine whether emotions affect this process.
- We believe that the Black Lives Matter movement grew largely out of anger within the black community over police brutality.
- We examine the reactionary emotions expressed by Twitter users shortly after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson and the following protests that ensued.
- Cognitive appraisal theories of emotions find that anger mobilizes people to confront those responsible for negative transgressions (Lazarus 1991).

## Research Design

- Data was collected by Ed Summers, Lead Developer of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) using the search term "Ferguson."
- MITH specializes in text and image analytics for cultural heritage collections, data curation, digital preservation
- Tweets were collected between August 10th, 2014 through August 27th with missing days on August 13th and 21st.
- This search resulted in 13 million tweets with 3.5 million unique tweets.
- 2,900 of these tweets were coded into categories of Sadness, Anger, Fear and Hope based on what was expressed in the tweet.
- Tweets were also separated to determine who was expressing an emotion.
- Tweets included a timestamp, which allowed us to compare emotions to timeline of events occurring in Ferguson.

## Current Research



## Discussion

- Anger was overwhelmingly expressed the most, followed by fear.
- Anger was expressed most during times of protest nationally and in Ferguson.
- Times of hope increased after and during times of overnight calm.
- Levels of fear remained mostly flat except during periods of national protests between August 14th and August 16th, when it increased significantly.

## Tweets

- "I'm so angry and heartbroken for the deceased #MichaelBrown and the community of #ferguson. He was MURDERED BY POLICE without provocation"
- "I am absolutely livid and horrified by what is happening in Ferguson. Honest to god it's like the 1960s have come back around"
- "How can they be safe when your cops shoot and kill innocent kids? Who can they trust? Who's protecting the people of #Ferguson"

## Future Research

This research offers a glimpse into the emotions of a repressed citizenry. It will be interesting to study other social movements throughout history using this method. Although recent progressive movements have used technology to disseminate their message, other groups throughout history were not afforded that luxury. Past movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti Lynching Movements can also be studied using opinion expressed by editorials, guest columns and letters to the editor in newspapers.

## References

Lazarus, Richard. "S.(1991). Emotion and adaptation."

McAdams, Doug. *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Rickford, Russell. "Black Lives Matter Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle." *New Labor Forum*. Vol. 25. No. 1. SAGE Publications, 2016.

The data for this project was collected by Ed Summers of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities(mith.umd.edu).

Graphs shown in the poster were created by Neil Lund.