



9-26-2013

Ngram 150th: Race, Sex and Big Data

John M. Rudy
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/interpretcw>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Rudy, John M., "Ngram 150th: Race, Sex and Big Data" (2013). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 91.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/interpretcw/91>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Ngram 150th: Race, Sex and Big Data

Abstract

Data is powerful in the right hands. Aggregate data is even more powerful. And Google is data.

One of the odder tools in the Google arsenal is the Ngram viewer a search engine which charts trends within the folds of Google Books' database. Punch in anything. I mean it. Try anything in the Ngram search engine and start falling down the historical trends rabbit hole. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Google, Research Trends

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

Creative Commons License

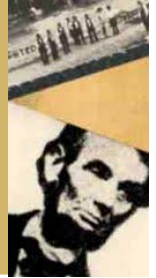
Creative

Commons
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)
License

Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

www.civilwarconnect.com



Ngram 150th: Race, Sex and Big Data

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2013

Data is powerful in the right hands. Aggregate data is even more powerful. And Google *is* data.

One of the odder tools in the Google arsenal is the [Ngram viewer](#) a search engine which charts trends within the folds of Google Books' database. Punch in anything. I mean it. Try anything in the Ngram search engine and start falling down the historical trends rabbit hole.

Cross the power of big data with where my mind has been drifting of late here in Southern Pennsylvania, and you can start to see the birthpangs of modern racist dogma.

Wait, what?

With the [Ku Klux Klan once again threatening to protest something or other](#) here in Gettysburg, I've been thinking of that perennial bugaboo wielded by racists like a cudgel: miscegenation.

The argument is simple, especially when the Klan or other white supremacists employ it. In essence, and put in kind words which hate-mongers would likely pepper with expletives and slurs, any non-white man will defile the white daughters of America. In this upcoming protest, it looks like the boogiemans will be Latino immigrants.

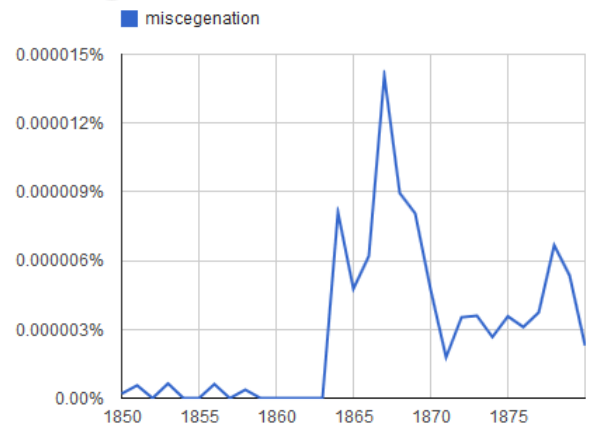


But the source of this age-old scare tactic might be something pure, something lovely, something fundamentally good: the Emancipation Proclamation.

Look at [that Ngram above](#).

As racists and bigots grasped for straws in the aftermath of Lincoln's Proclamation, desperately trying to find a reason black men shouldn't find freedom, they played on an innate fear. What man doesn't want to protect his wife? His daughter? His sister? If the black man was made free, the nascent argument grew in a sharp spike in 1864, insatiable lust for white women would take over.

Google books Ngram Viewer



Sex sells. And the argument employed by Copperheads in 1864 and 1865, the argument employed by the opponents of the Radical Republicans throughout Reconstruction, was pure sex.

It was at its core a stupid, bigoted argument. It was the last resort of a group of destructive bigots doomed to failure. And yet, [that hasn't stopped the term "miscegenation"](#) from climbing steadily up the Ngram ladder since 1863. 150 years of the last resort argument, still alive today.

Emancipation brought freedom. But freedom meant continued struggle. And the struggle continues today.

Welcome to the sesquicentennial of the advent of modern hatred; that's one anniversary I surely *won't* be celebrating.