

## **The Lifespans Project - White Paper**

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### **1. Project Description**

The Lifespans Project began as an exploration of how and why little magazines' run times, or lifespans, were so diverse. We originally sought to examine the editors' races and genders to look for correlations between those variables and magazines' run times. We started with a data-driven search, collecting the metadata housed on the Index of Modernist Magazines. Our preliminary regressions and visual representations did not reveal significant correlations between lifespans and our selected factors. As we worked with online platforms like *WordPress* and *Flourish*, we took a trial-and-error approach to exploring digital possibilities for our project. As English majors, we all varied in our technological experience, so those elements of the project were learning experiences for each of us.

Our project shifted from one with a concrete conclusion towards one with pedagogical explorations of digital humanities, which we hope will be helpful to future scholars. By integrating traditional scholarship, like our cases studies, with quantitative analyses, our website combines both close reading and digital media, representing what could be the future of an innovative undergraduate education in English. The Lifespans Project will be a page on the Index, which opens its audience anyone who uses the website to explore little magazines. The database is free and accessible online, so anyone can access both the Index and our Lifespans Project. We hope our final product will give scholars a framework through which they can investigate their own interests and contribute to a rapidly growing field of scholarship.

### **2. Individual Roles & Responsibilities:**

- Haley
  - Case Study Lead

- *The Colored American* Case Study
  - *Fire!!* Case Study
  - Data Analysis
- Kevin
  - Visualizations
  - Data Analysis
  - Regression Video
  - Contributors Section
- Lindsay
  - *Southwest Review* Case Study
  - Case Studies Introduction
  - Data Analysis
- Charlie
  - Data Visualizations + Excel work
  - Regression Video
  - Home Page
  - Enticement & Reward - Regression Section
- Teagan
  - Methodology & Purpose
  - Fusing The Lifespans Project & The Index of Modernist Magazines
  - Website Formatting
  - Digital Design

### 3. Project Goals and Objectives

The Lifespan Project's main objective was to contribute to the study of the various lifespans of little magazines through a computerized textual analysis. We wanted our project to be data-driven while also including socio-historical research, giving our metadata context, and we hoped to draw conclusions as to why some magazines had significantly shorter lifespans (*Fire!!*) than others (*Poetry*). We aimed to discover which variables, such as gender and race of the editors, price per issue, and financial backing, contribute to the longevity of the magazines' run times, if any.

To complete this process, we aspired to develop a central digitized location for our data. We wanted to use this data to create visualizations and regressions that could potentially demonstrate lifespan patterns. We also sought to use case studies to blend these potential

quantitative trends with historical factors. Ultimately, we hoped these tasks would contribute to our ultimate goal of developing a digitized location for both our data and our analyses.

#### 4. Project Activities & Process (Listed Chronologically)

1. Data compilation
  2. Determining critical metrics
  3. Visualization creation (helped immensely by Kyosung Koo, who introduced us to the Data Viz tool *Flourish*)
  4. Research & Annotated Bibliography
  5. Early graphs & playing with timeline platforms
  6. Lit reviews - less helpful to us than other groups (since our work is more quantitative) but interesting to see how our area of interest was explored (or not) by different scholars
  7. Basic website - updated visualizations (purple star! yay!), scrapped the timeline
  8. Updating data to create uniformity in dates, locations (data scrubbing)
  9. Fixing website structure
  10. Re-organizing data to run statistical regressions and compare “r values”
  11. First regression video draft
  12. First case study drafts
  13. Added directions for visualizations
  14. Looked for advice on making the website more user friendly
  15. Moving to the index
  16. Video draft #2
  17. Further website design
  18. Finishing up Case studies
  19. Finishing up website design on the index
  20. Revising from hypothesis comments
  21. Finalizing methodology & purpose
  22. Final regression video + framing
- Around 10 project-related meetings total

#### 5. Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Our group set out to identify contributing factors to a little modernist magazine’s lifespan, specifically the magazines detailed on the *Index*, and as a group we honed skills of data organization, digital design, quantitative analysis, and visual expression. We started by compiling and arranging the data on the Index of Modernist Magazines, logging and organizing each magazine’s information in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which tested our ability to evenly divide labor and stay conscientious throughout a relatively mundane process.

Next, we experimented with various methods of visually representing our data set. We tested several different aesthetic designs for our website, starting from scratch multiple times.

For instance, Haley and Kevin worked on designing a timeline to graphically represent our magazines and their respective time periods, but we abandoned the idea, because the timeline interface was aesthetically inconsistent with our website and, more importantly, it did not enable viewers to visually compare one magazine's duration to the others. These early shortcomings tested our willingness to start over, our ability to give up on something not working and move on to alternative strategies.

Looking for trends and patterns in our data developed our ability to apply quantitative methodologies to our project, which challenged us to creatively think outside of the box. There typically is not very much quantitative analysis in English courses or literary scholarship, so we had to think carefully about which methods struck the best balance between simplicity (so people could understand what we were doing) and effectiveness (so we could push the boundaries of literary scholarship). We wanted to be innovative but understood, and this pushed us to figure out how to "bridge the gap." For instance, there were certain statistical processes that might have yielded slightly more significant results than the ones we employed, but they were far more complex and too difficult to succinctly explain, so we abandoned them for "middle ground" methods we felt our audience could follow.

Finally, bringing all of the elements of our project together developed our humility. It can be hard to let go of something that someone works hard to develop in the interest of the project's overall cohesiveness. Though some inequality of production is inevitable, we feel our project is relatively balanced in terms of personal contributions, and we love how the variety of our contributions renders our project multifaceted without compromising integrity or consistency. With more time we may have written more magazine case studies, employed more sophisticated

economic analyses, and created a generally larger website, but we don't feel we had to compromise structurally or organizationally by submitting to a time constraint.

## **6. Works Cited**

See website for our project's works cited page.