

Assignment # 1: New York Times Historical Archive

Trends in newspaper coverage of public issues can provide important information on public attention to those issues. The New York Times Historical Archive is a searchable text data base of the daily *New York Times* for the 1851-1999 time period. In this assignment we ask you to replicate a series of searches in the archive for the key phrase “civil rights.” Then create a chart that displays some of the civil rights data. In addition we ask you to choose a word or a phrase that captures an issue of interest to you, and to complete a search that spans three data points. Finally, we ask you to enter the results of your search in an EXCEL data base, and to produce a chart that displays the historical time series you have created.

To access the archive, enter LIAS. Choose E-Resources (A-Z). **Choose New York Times Historical (1851-1999).** You will access the Basic Search Screen. Chose “More Search Options,” and you will access the search screen you will use.

The basic unit of analysis for creating time series of newspaper attention to issues is a count. For the first part of this assignment, we ask that you generate annual counts for the phrase “civil rights.” Enter civil rights in the search window. Create counts for the three years 1958, 1964 and 1970. This requires you to set the date range to capture all mentions of civil rights in a year. Choose the “From: To:” option and set the data range for your first search. From: 01/01/1958 To: 12/31/1958. Replicate to choose subsequent years. You could choose spans of multiple years or shorter spans—months, for instance.

When you command a search, it will make different choices based upon the two additional fields, “Look for terms in:” and “Article Type.” As a result, your search will generate differing counts depending upon which choices you make. In the former you have two choices: “Citation and article text” or “Citation and abstract.” The first is a wider search than the second. In “Article Type” you have a wide range of choices. Complete the following searches for Civil Rights and record your result.

Citation and Article Text: Civil Rights

1958	1964	1970
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Any Article Type

Front Page

Citation and Abstract: Civil Rights

1958	1964	1970
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Any Article Type

Front Page

Then create an Excel data base out of you results, and create a chart that displays them.

You will notice that any number of other possible search conditions can be created. For instance, you might look only at editorial articles that would provide a somewhat different kind of attention to the civil rights issue than front-page coverage.

Now choose a key word or phrase for an issue that interests you. Examples might include capital punishment, weapons of mass destruction, abortion, or feminism. Some key words and phrases are easier to use for searches than others. For instance, let's say you were interest in citizen protest. If you use the keyword "protest" you will get counts for all articles using the word, but its meaning will not always be public protest. So you may have to use some trial and error in choosing the word or phrase you will use for your search. Complete a search that has at least three time points to map the attention to the issue you have chosen and make a chart that displays the time trend.