NYC DH Week Kickoff

BY TAYLOR FAIRES
FEBRUARY 3, 2020
CATEGORIES: DHC WEEKLY, GENERAL UPDATES, NEWS AND REVIEWS

It's NYC DH Week, the week we've all been waiting for!

Monday was the kickoff for the week and there were various presentations from a large cohort of incredible digital humanists. Some of their projects are highlighted below.

"Who We Are": Visualizing NYC by the Numbers

Who We Are at the Museum of the city of New York

It's census season and *"Who We Are"* shows us why that's important. The exhibit is currently housed in the Museum of the City of New York and features independent-yet-connected data visualizations about the population of New York using census data. What's just as important as who's represented is

who *isn't*. People are missing from the census, and it's often minorities. This matters because the census is "how the 435 members of the House of Representatives are allocated among the states," (Brookings). *"Who We Are"* explores this and other issues.

Visit the website to learn more!

Moving Saints of the Bronx

Website for Moving Saints of the Bronx

Fordham students in the Bronx worked within the class "Modern Latin American Art" to create an interactive website that depicted Catholic art and objects throughout the Latinx community in the Bronx. This project helps understand the "role of religious cult objects in anchoring diasporic communities from Latin America to a new homeland in urban New York." The site itself was made on Omeka, an open source platform that we work with at the DHC.

Visit the website

Contactrot and other Projects by Jonah Brucker
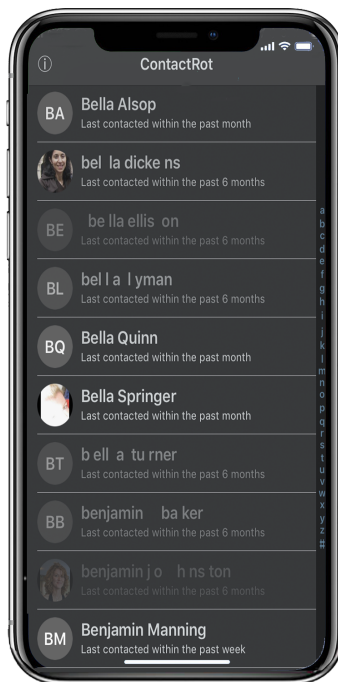
Contactrot from coin-operated.com

Jonah Brucker is an artist and a professor at CUNY Lehman College. Many of his projects focus on the intersection of technology and people. The one that I found the most fascinating was called ContactRot, a contact-list app created to mimic the human memory. When you stop calling or texting a person, the listing of the contact slowly fades away, losing letters or numbers of the contact until it is entirely deleted. The project looks at our over-reliance on technology to remember. "When these items begin to disappear, we ultimately lose touch with people to the point of being forced to contact them in other ways (e.g., real life) to get the data back," (coin-operated.com).

Visit his website here to see Contactrot and other projects.

DHC Weekly 9/30- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

BY TAYLOR FAIRES
OCTOBER 2, 2019
**CATEGORIES: DHC WEEKLY, NEWS AND REVIEWS**
TAGS: CLIMATE CHANGE, MAPPING, SOCIAL MEDIA

Hello again! The past few weeks have been very busy here at the DHC as we head into the semester. More posts to come this week on past events and what to look forward to this semester, but to start off the week, let's talk about maps again.

The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication released a map in late September demonstrating the spatial layout of opinions surrounding climate change. YPCCC has been integral in discussing a forgotten aspect of climate change, *how do we talk about it?* While many other programs on climate change focus on the phenomenon itself, the way we talk about the issue matters. Unlike many other policy issues, climate change is hard to reduce to a single, definitive, soundbite. In fact, the Design Center's post-bacc, Yisel Garcia, is focusing on climate change communications for her independent project this year!

The YPCCC gets most of its information through surveys and questionnaires, and while it does do work on the effectiveness of certain climate change frameworks, the maps I'm going over today are a from a survey of public opinion. For example, this is the spatial distribution of people who believe that global warming is happening. The information on this map is based on a national survey and demographic information. For more information on how these estimates were made, check out the YPCCC's methodology page.
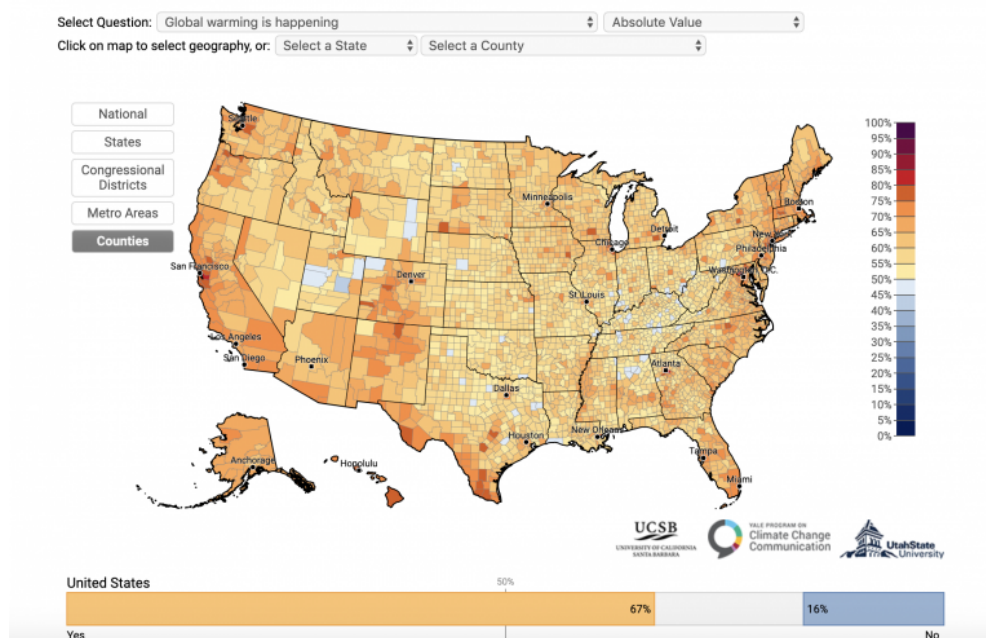
This map shows the estimated percentage of each county in the United States or people who believe that global warming is happening. On the individual county level, the estimated percentages seem to be between 45%-85%.

This map, though incredibly helpful, doesn't show the whole picture. That's where the interactive component comes in. Interested parties can toggle through different options to show opinions at the county, city, district, state, and national levels. In addition to this, you can also see how each county differs from the national average.
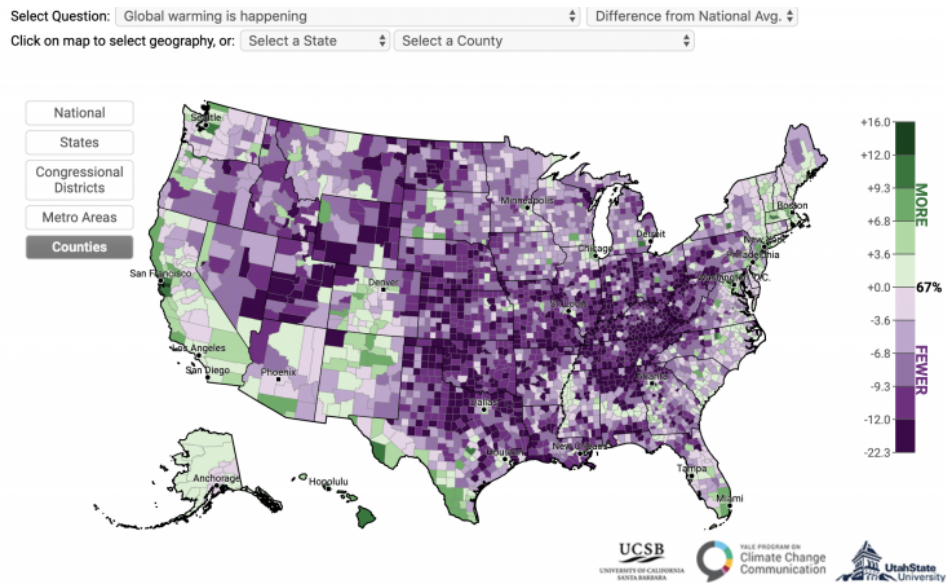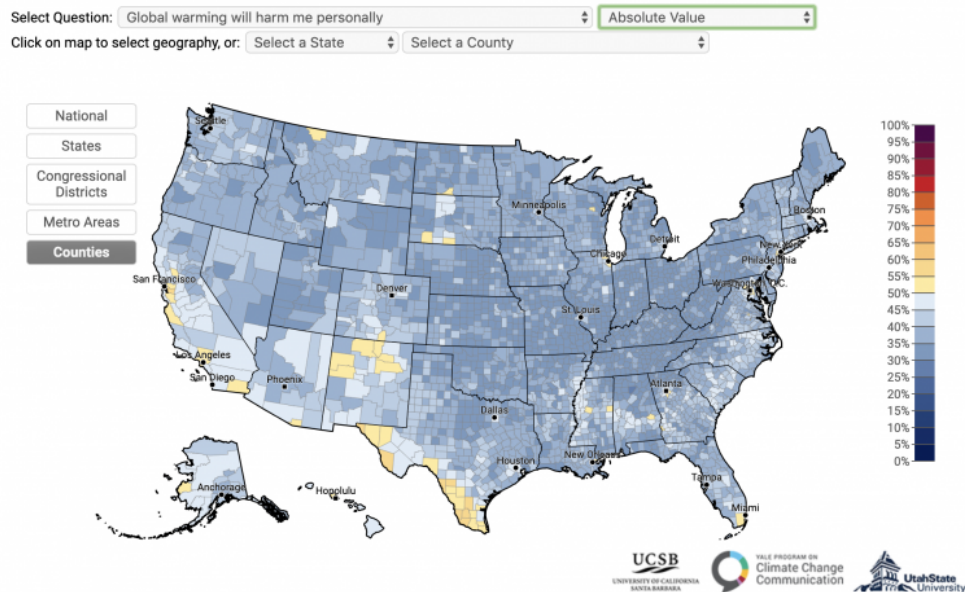
If we look at this map, we can see that the coastal areas as well as select parts of the Southwest have estimated percentages higher than the national average.

We can get a great deal of information from this map. Many areas in green are likely to be affected by climate change with hurricanes, droughts, or the rise in sea levels. In addition to this, many green areas are in high population areas such as California or Northeastern cities. This exercise is not to explain, definitively, why these distributions show up the way they do, but rather to show the importance of showing data in multiple different ways to get the full picture.

Now let's explore another part of the survey! Below is a map showing the distribution of people who agree with the statement "Climate change will affect me personally."

At first, the difference looks stark. However, you can see that the blue doesn't necessarily reflect that no one believes that climate change will affect them personally, it simply reflects that a smaller percentage of people do. This brings me to another great aspect of this interactive map. You can select the percentages you want to show up by clicking on the bar next to the map.

Estimated % of adults who think global warming will harm them personally (42%), 2019
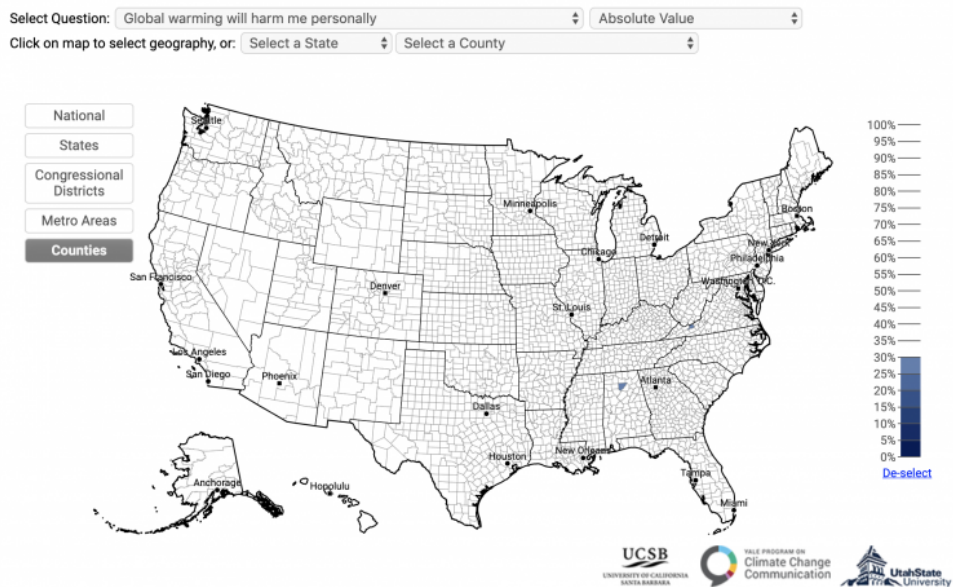
While the estimated national percentage of people who believe that climate change will affect them personally is only 42%, there are only two counties in the country, Cullman County, Alabama and Bland County, Virginia, in which an estimated 30% or less of the population believes this.

Below the 30% mark, very few counties are highlighted on the map. Only two, to be precise. It is also worth noting that in no county in the United States, according to YPCCC's estimates, does less than 25% of the population believe that climate change will affect them personally.

Finally, I want to highlight the data regarding the media and climate change. Below are a series of maps depicting conversations and media coverage of climate change.
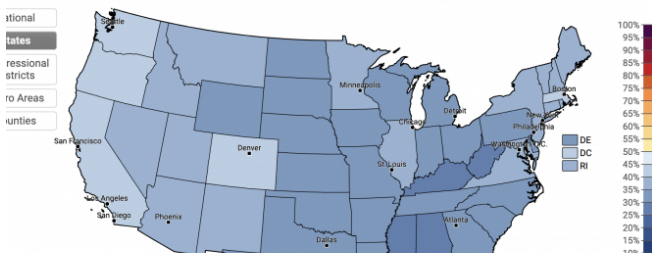
A majority of people don't talk about climate change
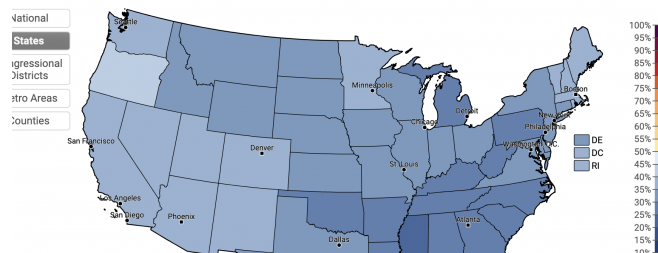
Even fewer people hear about climate change in media frequently

The reason I chose to highlight this data is partially personal. As a recent graduate of a liberal college in a liberal city, I can easily say that I hear about climate change via media **daily** (if not more) and I talk about it probably just as much. The idea that so many people could go a week without hearing about it from the media was really shocking to me. This made me realize something I already knew but tended to ignore, our social media shows us what it thinks is important to us. On the flip side, if Facebook or Twitter's algorithms don't think you would care to hear about climate change, news about it won't show up.

This may seem obvious and, in a way, it is. Why would you read about something you're not interested in? The implications, however, aren't great. How are we supposed to be informed about the news if we are only shown things that algorithms assume we'll agree with? What this data demonstrates is that we need to find a better way to stay informed. The fact that a majority of Americans don't hear about climate change *weekly* is, perhaps, not the most pressing issue in our political landscape. The YPCCC map, does, however, show us a problem:

There's an information gap.

Information regarding climate change isn't reaching everyone uniformly and this isn't something that can be easily fixed. The problem is indicative of a much larger problem regarding media coverage. The YPCCC interactive map shows the distribution of opinions on climate change. It shows that the U.S.

is far from united on the matter. The data also suggest that media coverage isn't fixing the issue. While the map doesn't give us answers as to how to address the information gap, it does do a wonderful job of showing the landscape of opinions in the United States. I'm really excited about the work the YPCCC is doing to characterize the information gap and to find solutions!

If you're interested in learning more about the YPCCC, check out their website! The data used to create the map is downloadable and may be useful for your academic research. If you'd like to hear more from me on how social media divides us, join me at the DHC next Monday 1:30-2:30 PM for our first lunchtime book series where I'll be talking about Trick Mirror by Jia Tolentino.

DHC Weekly Blog 8/26: What you show matters!

BY TAYLOR FAIRES
AUGUST 1, 2019
CATEGORIES: DHC WEEKLY, METHODS AND ETHICS OH MY
TAGS: #BARNARDDHCFELLOW, AMAZON, ETHICS, MAPPING

Hello all! I'm not sure if you were all aware, but there are fires in the Amazon.

I'm Taylor, by the way. I'm the new post-baccalaureate fellow for the Digital Humanities Center with an introduction post to come soon. Before that, however, I want to talk about a subject near and dear to my heart: the Amazon Rainforest.

In this week's blog post, I'm going to review two maps of the fires that I have seen on social media. One is from Business Insider and the other is from a British news site called Express. There is a lot of media coverage of these fires and, as such, I'd like to take the time to go over how important data visualization is in this coverage. Our previous fellow, Sylvia, made some great guides about mapping tools and I'd like to expand that conversation. Maps can fundamentally change the way that information is reported and interpreted. Remember, there is *no such thing as a purely objective report.*

Above is a map that I've seen circulating a lot over social media. It depicts South America with a large swath of red. There isn't a caption to this image as it was originally from a video. When you look at this, it looks bad... really bad. The way the data is portrayed suggests that the fires in the rainforest are, actually, just one, catastrophically huge fire that threatens to consume the entire country. It opens eyes. It has a sense of urgency. People see this and are ready to get on a plane. There's nothing inherently wrong with this sense of urgency, but the data is portraying a situation that is not the reality of Brazil right now.
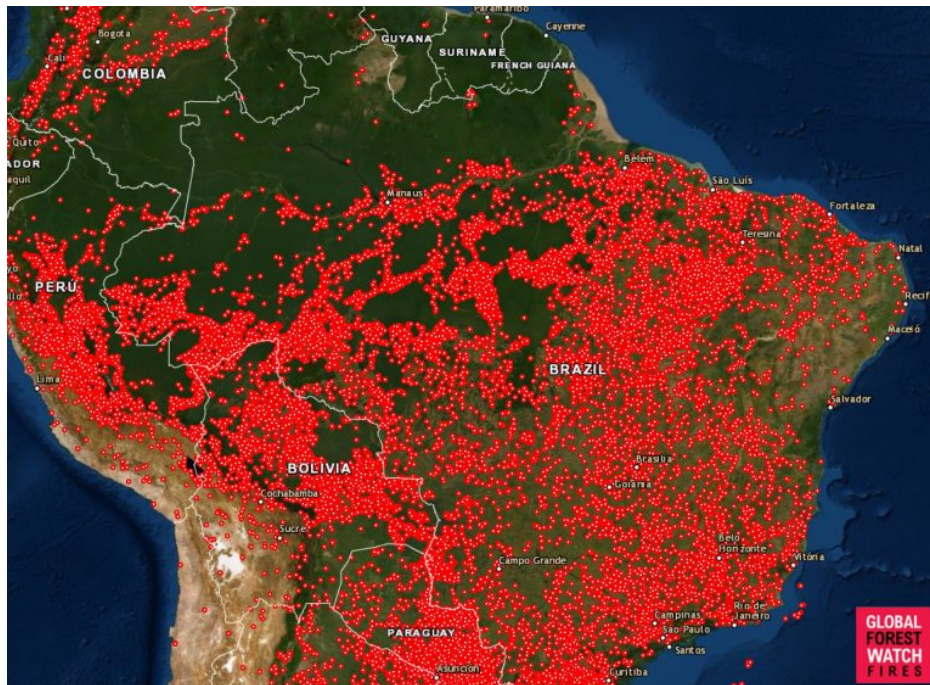
SOURCE: _The caption on Business Insider was "This map shows every fire that has started burning since August 13th across South America. Courtesy of Global Fire Watch"_

When you see this map, it still looks bad. It still gives a sense of urgency; however, if you look at the caption and more closely at the map, you see that it is not just one big fire, but hundreds of little fires. Not only this, but the caption explains that these are _all_ of the fires since August 13th. While the caption doesn't say that some of these fires are now out, it does at least suggest this.

The difference in these maps is important. The map from Global Fire Watch and Business Insider portrays a situation that is much closer to reality. There is not one fire ravaging the Amazon, but many little fires. This data visualization is important because there are so many articles right now that are telling different stories. None of them are entirely wrong. They're using different data and it's confusing.

The situation in the Amazon is that there _have been_ many fires this month. Many of which have been started intentionally for agricultural purposes. When you put up a map like the first one, people think it's a natural disaster. It isn't. What's going on in the Amazon is human-led deforestation and, while tragic,

it is no accident. We need to shift the conversation to *why* those fires are started in the first place and *how* to move towards sustainable development. Portraying these fires as accidental obscures the need for a candid conversation about business interests and how they impact the environment.

You may be thinking, "Wait, Taylor, this is all science stuff. What does that have to do with digital humanities?" And to that, I say, "everything." While these maps may be portraying an environmental issue, what we learn from it is relevant to all disciplines. When you use maps for a project, know that you are responsible for how they are read. As previously mentioned, no map is free from bias or agenda. It's easy in disciplines that aren't "hard sciences" to get the brunt of the subjectivity critique, but the fact of the matter is that even "hard sciences" are subject to biases and should go about research carefully.

As researchers, in any discipline, it is important to realize the power of data visualization and to need to wield that power responsibly.