

PubPub Help

Experiences, Perspectives, and Positionalities with "Esse quam videri"

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What is your community? Who is involved? Why did you start it?

In teaching literature courses, I (Kelsey Dufresne) often bring in the [Whitman, Alabama](#) documentary series to demonstrate contemporary applications of literature (especially poetry written in the 1800s) - as well as how poetry can bring people together. As an admirer of this project, I began wondering what a North Carolina version of this work could be like - and how we could draw upon the work of Langston Hughes, who wrote in response to/critique of Whitman's work.

With this context, at the end of 2021 I connected with Margaret Baker about a potential project idea involving poetry, community-centered learning, and video production. Margaret is a media specialist, and my background is in English education and working with community-based organizations - and this project would draw upon each of these skill sets as we aimed to create a video-based mural that centers on the diverse lived-experiences of North Carolinians.

As such, our community, quite broadly, is striving to include all of North Carolina in the United States. Right now, we are aiming to collaborate with one person from each of North Carolina's 100 counties to enable folks from each county, all across NC, to learn from each other.

What would you say was the main focus or goal of the community?

The main goal of reaching this community through the corresponding project was to utilize documentary filmmaking and poetry as tools to contribute one multimodal account that amplifies and celebrates the diversity of the state of North Carolina, and by extension the United States.

Why is your work important? What are you trying to do? What's meaningful about your work right now?

I think our work is important because we are trying to highlight and celebrate the diversity of our state, during a time in which diversity is not celebrated in our country at large and when such conversations are being banned and prohibited from classroom spaces. All the more, we are striving to cultivate opportunities for conversations and for learning (as seen in our [Teaching and Learning](#)) in efforts to make the celebration sustainable beyond the scope of this work.

(How) has publishing openly changed your organization/model?

At the start, we knew we wanted this work and community to be accessible, discoverable, and useful for the folks we were aiming to serve and reach. More importantly, we knew we did not want the work and efforts to be gatekept behind paywalls and exclusively academic-oriented spheres of knowledge production and sharing.

Why did you choose PubPub? What other platforms did you try?

We chose PubPub due to our prioritization of accessibility and openness. As such, PubPub was the only platform that we explored.

How have you made your community your own? (layout/design/custom stuff)

For esse quam videri: “make America again,” I tried to maintain ease of access and navigation by having four main pages:

1. Home: with a project trailer and brief description
2. Making America Again: with different Pubs containing the videos and photographs from each of the different counties that have participated
3. Teaching and Learning: with different Pubs for different lesson plans, activities, and discussion guides
4. Poem: with Langston Hughes’s “Let America Be America Again” in typed form, as well as a video of all the participants reading different lines

What elements have you experimented with?

As we are in the beginning phase of this work, we still hope to incorporate some elements that will require some customization and experimentation. This would include adding a map that would allow users to hold their cursor over the different counties to learn quick statistics and have direct access to the corresponding Pub as it is developed and published.

What kind of features would you like to see?

Right now we are really satisfied with the ease of media incorporation. With that said, it would be wonderful to have gallery formats to easily embed and share images/photographs.

What communities/work inspires yours?

I worked previously with the [Fermentology](#) community — which I think is a tremendous example of how PubPub supports an array of media for multimodal learning and knowledge sharing. Moreover, Fermentology has effectively organized their materials to showcase all sorts of knowledge in a fun, informative, and

accessible manner. As such, I think my work with the Fermentology team has certainly informed how I approach working with PubPub for esse quam videri: "make America again."

What has local outreach looked like for you?

For this project specifically, Margaret and I have tried to connect with one individual from a variety of different North Carolina communities and counties. We have done this by relying on personal networks (a friend of a friend of a friend that knows someone who might be interested) as well as cold-calling folks to ask if they would like to participate. For example, I reached out to the NC Aquarium in Fort Fisher by calling and emailing them, whereas Margaret connected us with a Speech Pathologist and PT in Greenville through personal contacts. These methods would result in no responses or individuals that we then visited in their hometowns or places of work.

Through both avenues of connection and outreach, we found that folks were very interested in the work, in sharing their stories, and inviting everyone to come visit their towns and counties.

How does this fit into other projects you're working on / other projects within this sphere?

We identify that this work falls under the methods and traditions of digital humanities and critical making, but, more importantly, we have also attempted to actionize and follow the [Design Justice Network Principles](#).

Does rurality change your strategies at all? [and] How are you selecting the towns you're highlighting?

Because Margaret and myself are both Ph.D. students based in Raleigh, North Carolina, we are expensing this project and thus responsible for our own lodging, gas, and travel/transportation. This resulted in us trying to connect with individuals in counties that were geographically closer to our own (Wake County) and having to delay interview opportunities with individuals that live on the far western side of the state. Simultaneously, we strove to connect and interview individuals in both city spaces (such as in Chapel Hill and Greenville) as well as far more rural towns (like Pinetown). In doing so, we were able to engage in conversations with a wide variety of individuals with very different lived experiences, perspectives, and positionalities.

How is this being used for learning and classrooms?

The hope is that this work will be able to be incorporated into both classroom learning spaces (K-12 and higher education) as well as in other spaces where learning occurs, like people's homes and community buildings. Because of this, I developed [Teaching and Learning](#) materials (lessons, activities, discussion guides, and more) to scaffold such educational and learning implementation and I illustrate how this work aligns with the [Learning for Social Justice's Social Justice Anchor Standards](#).

What's the significance of the Langston Hughes poem? How does it inspire your work?

Langston Hughes's poem "Let America Be America Again" explores and critiques the identification of America (the United States) as an idyllic utopia that is "the land of the free." Through this poem, Hughes illustrates that such depictions of America are exclusionary to only those who have the privilege to experience the country in this way — and, in doing so, Hughes demonstrates how America has not yet reached its potential, but it can. This poem, written in the 1930s, still holds much truth for how our country exists and operates today. As such, our work aims to situate this poem and its message within our state to demonstrate the urgency of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of North Carolina.