5-2016

The American Data Culture Since 1820: From Madison's Political Philosophy to Nielsen Ratings

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May 2016

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Abstract

Three decades after peoplemeters were introduced into the business of syndicated audience measurement, there are approximately 20,000 peoplemeter-installed households in the US. However, growth of peoplemeters has been far slower or stationary in similarly developed countries: Japan's number has yet to hit over 1,000; the UK's has stayed between 4,000 and 5,000 for over two decades. Presuming that cultural variance is a critical variable in determining how particular television advertising markets respond to technological innovation in audience measurement, this study attempts to identify American data culture by using what historians say about the American past as ethnographic data. To understand the unique data culture of the US, this study examines a historian's transcription of President Kennedy's 1963 order of a survey on racial equality as representative, employing Clifford Geertz's semiotic definition of culture. Identifying its historical origins, this study asserts that American data culture has been perpetuated primarily by the evangelical beliefs in God's benevolence and common sense, once forged by the radical egalitarianism of the American Revolution and incorporated institutionally in the schedule of the 1820 Census. Informed by Madisonian insights on the role of limited government, this egalitarian culture has led the American people to maintain unique habits of mind useful for reaching a better state of Union.

Keywords: Audience measurement, American data culture, peoplemeter, egalitarianism, American Revolution, James Madison

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<u>Introduction</u>

Established as a transaction standard according to which the revenue of advertiser-supported media industry is allocated, ratings data often play a significant role, for example, in shaping cultural landscape along which the character of a citizen body is constituted. In most of the developed countries of the world today, a higher ratings point means more audience attention to be sold to advertisers, which in turn guides the programming of commercial media outlets and, consequently, the people's cultural diet. Therefore, ratings data are likely to become an object of political contention not only among those who have stakes in how advertising revenue is distributed but also among those who deeply care about the cultural diet, such as ethnic minorities. To fend off the possibility of such a political complication that may disrupt the transaction standard, a ratings data service usually strives for an accurate picture of audience. But why, then, was one national TV-ad market quicker than the others in adopting peoplemeters, which are both innovative and accurate? One reason must be the economies of scale. My own statistical analyses of advanced economies hypothesized that national spending on pay TV programming would crowd out that on advertiser-supported TV programming and indeed found that a larger TV-ad market with a smaller pay-television market was likely to have a larger peoplemeter panel, meaning more accurate ratings data (Jung, 2009).[1]

However, the variance in accuracy of peoplemeter ratings data could not be explained by the economies of scale alone, and the analyses picked out two cases so distinct as to appear to defy the market-size explanation: the U.S. and Japan.

Furthermore, because almost all of the advanced economies included in the dataset of my

previous paper had followed the same principles of liberal democracy and market

economy since the end of the World War II, with convergence among them expedited in

many ways by technological progress, it seemed reasonable that their distinctiveness

might be explained by cultural differences. Specifically, I found the US to be

distinctively aggressive and Japan to be distinctively cautious in embracing peoplemeter

technology (Jung, 2009). Accordingly, I have coined the term "data culture." By *data

culture*, I mean a group of symbolic devices that work as public sources of information as

to how one should go about the creation and use of social data. Different data cultures,

expressed in what different peoples say and do about social data, would inform each

nation differently, for example, influencing how much money should be invested to

create better ratings data. To understand this data culture, I choose to perform a cultural

analysis and interpretation of what historians have written about a nation's past,

following Geertz (1973) who conceptualized culture in semiotic terms. This study, which

identifies key aspects of the U.S. data culture, is the first in a series of case studies on

different data cultures I have planned.

Before embarking on the theoretical adventure to isolate American data culture as

an object of understanding, let me briefly elaborate on data culture less as a descriptive

variable than as an explanatory variable to illuminate the distinct diffusion paths of

peoplemeters, for which Glickmann's (2011) discussion of what is meant by culture in

the recent scholarship of American cultural history is a good entry point:

> A key element of the expansion of cultural history is precisely its refusal to limit
> the meaning of the cultural to what is left over after politics and economics. This
> has manifested itself especially in an interest in reconsidering the relationship
> among social, political, and economic structures. Part of this is doubtlessly

motivated by the recognition that contemporary politics often lags behind the culture in areas like gay rights, and often seems shaped by cultural forces rather than the reverse. Scholars of the branch of recent cultural history that focuses on the history of capitalism have been particularly attuned to the dialectic between culture and structure. (pp. 228-229)

Joyce Appleby, one such scholar, has asserted the primacy of culture over capitalism in *The Relentless Revolution*, according to which culture precedes capitalism and thereby determines the overall historical path (Glickmann, 2011). In the same vein, contemporary political changes in the gay rights area have been prepared by "cultural forces," which, by the way, poses a question to be answered—what does the phrase mean? The historical context of the gay rights movement taken into account, *cultural forces* may specifically mean the tradition of rights-based liberalism:

> …The civil rights movement, with its focus on the vote and public accommodations, gave way to a new rights-based mobilization as different classes of citizens made demands for compensation and regulatory protection based on special claims rooted in race, sex, ethnicity, religion, language, age, physical handicap, or sexual orientation. (Jacobs, 2011, p. 165)

Subsequently, Jacobs (2011) argues that by focusing on legal problems, the rights-based liberalism prevented other latent reform agendas such as socioeconomic inequality from materializing. Similarly, what Glickmann (2011, pp. 228-229) has meant by *culture* in contrast to economic structure may refer to what Polanyi called the "tacit dimension," a set of assumptions that stipulate what, for example, capitalism was going to look like but are too natural to have been recognized consciously while the economic structure was being built (Hirschman, 1975, p. 69). Or it may be more fully grasped than otherwise by being conceived as shared latent grammar of thoughts, speeches, and actions that consequently stipulates what is to be—and thus what is not to be—recognized, talked about, and deliberated and acted upon collectively. This closely resembles James Carey's

conception of communication as culture, according to which every human activity is a symbolic work to produce the public world for us to "take up residence in" (Carey, 1989, p. 30). Here again, culture, through which the way the real is conceived and acted upon is interpreted, precedes what is deemed as the real. Consequently, that interpretative order should count as a reserve of cultural forces to shape the reality, the variance in which I expect will be found to be helpful for explaining the divergence of peoplemeters diffusion paths.

<div align="center">Places of Inquiry</div>

The Beginning

What determines the quality of ratings data that both sellers of ad spots and media buyers accept as a transaction standard according to which attention of audiences is monetized? More than a decade ago, I used statistical information to test two hypothetical answers to this question: First, the accuracy of syndicated audience measurement is likely to depend on the size of the media advertising market it serves; second, any ratings measurement procedure adopted by a specific media-advertising market represents an equilibrium among stakeholders with an interest in the exchange of audience as commodity, an implication of which is that tugs-of-war between these stakeholders may enhance or impede adopting improved measurement methods. As predicted, the variance in the ratings data quality could not be explained solely by market-size variance. Specifically, Japan was extremely cautious in her approach to peoplemeter technology, whose first wave of peoplemeter installation in 1994 was years behind the prediction based on its market size (Jung, 2009).

Adoption of peoplemeters in Japan was complicated and protracted because the measurement technology was deemed to threaten the interests of some influential stakeholders in Japan's television advertising market. In other words, the case was hypothesized to be distinct from the others in that its ratings data quality could be explained less by the market size than by conflicts among the interest-driven stakeholders. Indeed, when the peoplemeter-using economies whose per capita income hit over U.S. $10,000 in 1997 grouped statistically in terms of income, population, ratio of urban population, total expenditure on TV ads, peoplemeter-households-panel size, and the year of peoplemeter introduction, the case of Japan was found to be the most distinct among them but one (Jung, 2009). For one thing, the number of peoplemeter-installed households in Japan has remained much smaller than the prediction based on the size of television advertising market; the dominant audience measurement company in Japan, Video Research (VR), started to measure personal viewing with its own peoplemeters in 1997 with only 300 households and increased the size of households panel to 600 in 2001 and to 900 in 2005 for the last time until now, as of August 2013.[2] Note that one of the critical factors to determine sampling-error size of syndicated research is audience-panel size.

Unexpectedly, however, when cluster analysis grouped the TV-ad markets that had embraced peoplemeter technology, it was the US that emerged to be the most distinctive among the rather advanced economies, with the largest per capita expenditure on TV ads except Hong Kong and Japan (Jung, 2009). More tellingly, the peoplemeter-households-panel size of such early adopters of the measurement technology as the UK and Germany, whose first batch of peoplemeters had been installed respectively in 1984

and in 1985, was hovering around 5,000 households by 1997 throughout the next decade

of the 2000s, while that of the US, whose first batch of peoplemeters had been installed in

1987, grew fourfold to reach the 20,000-households level (James, 2012).[3] Note that

relative population size does not matter for controlling the magnitude of sampling error,

which is supposed to be the critical factor to determine accuracy of TV ratings when

global diffusion of peoplemeters and thus the allegedly homogenized nonsampling error

taken into account. Nevertheless, the set of parameters put into the statistical tests was so

crude that only rough conjectures could be made as to why the then two biggest

economies in the world appeared to deviate from the normal and simultaneously made

such a stark contrast (Jung, 2009).[4] From the bird's-eye view, however, the peculiarities

of the two cases seemed originated less from politics or economics than from culture, not

least because of the commonality of their political systems and economies, reinforced by

technological advances. More specifically, it was the consensus-driven business culture

that bogged down the adoption of peoplemeters in Japan (Melville, 1999, pp. 170-172).

Although conflicts among interest-driven stakeholders that I formerly

hypothesized to deflect the influence of market size on ratings data accuracy clearly made

peoplemeter adoption in Japan difficult (Jung 2009), it was Japan's business culture that

made the landing even wobblier. What determined the course of peoplemeters adoption

in Japan was less the technological merits of the new measurement technology as such

than the extent to which its supporters succeeded to appease the other stakeholders, who

were entitled to "a chance to have their needs met" (Melville, 1999, p. 171) by the

business culture. While supporting the notion that the stakeholders' interests should be

taken into account to explain the behavioral variance among advertising markets in

embracing new measurement technology to improve ratings data, what happened when

peoplemeters were introduced in Japan provides a preview of the role data culture can

play in understanding the variance. In short, Japanese data culture encouraged the

stakeholders to demand a concession from the peoplemeter supporters, probably more

than could be justified by economic, technological rationales.

On the other hand, the US may have been rendered more aggressive than justified

by economies of scale and the arrangement of stakeholders' interests in expanding

peoplemeters audience panel by such a distinct data culture as Igo (2007) described:

> Public opinion polls were especially resisted by other national governments,
> which perceived surveyors as infringing upon the prerogatives of traditional
> decision shapers, namely, political leaders and journalists. Polls would not
> become a crucial aspect of public life in Britain until after World War Ⅱ, and in
> France until the 1960s. Surveys had a distinctive career in the United States, not
> simply because of American's often-remarked-upon fascination with data about
> themselves but because of the extensive, entrepreneurial, and unrestricted
> character of American-style social investigation. (p. 15)

Here, note the elite-centered political culture that went against the public opinion poll in

non-U.S. cases. In other words, the exceptional egalitarianism that I will show in the

following to be a prominent characteristic of American data culture made it easier for

Americans to use survey data for public decision-making. In the same vein, I have

conjectured that American data culture was responsible for the exceptional growth of

peoplemeters panel. Below, I will identify American data culture by looking into

American histories, and this is a good place to explain why I have chosen to use histories

as an entry into American data culture.

Culture and History

The truism that lagging behind technological breakthroughs, culture evolves rather slowly implies that one had better turn to the historical past behind something harder to grasp otherwise than in cultural terms. For example, Dower's (1999) history of postwar Japan helps understand why Japan was found distinctively cautious in adopting peoplemeter technology that was expected to make invisible audience appear more matter-of-factly. Specifically, he asserts that intellectual culture of "Kiyomizu-dera delusion" (p. 531) under which Japanese elites had avoided confronting matter of facts while making the fateful decision to wage a war against the US led them to repeat the same failure in preparing Japan for postwar transition. Similarly, to examine American cultural history will show what remains unchanged despite the successive political realignments and sea changes in economy and technology since the American Revolution to illuminate what separates the US from the other liberal democracies and advanced market economies, especially Japan. And it is through tracing this kind of recurring of the same that this paper aims to isolate American data culture as an object of theoretical understanding. In other words, the recurring will be interpreted as an expression of American data culture as such. Furthermore, this paper aims to show that such history of ideas cannot be articulated in full without referring to the ancient Greece, following in the footsteps of Lovejoy (1936), who picked up an enduring cultural meme—the book title of his inspiring precedent of this paper, *The Great Chain of Being*, represents the meme—from Plato's dialogues and illuminated its recurring over two millennia in different contexts.

Other historians have noted the difference between the American attitude toward

numerical information and those of the other nations. For example, the main phrase in

one of the Theodore Porter's book titles epitomizes the characteristic American

attitude—*Trust in Numbers* (Porter, 1995). The book grounds the exceptional rhetorical

power of numbers among the American citizens in the strong egalitarian streak of

American democracy. According to Porter (1995), numbers require less sophistication to

scrutinize and understand than does the esoteric jargon used in lieu of numbers among

French elites. For another example, mentioned in Glickman's (2011) overview of recent

scholarship on American cultural history, Igo (2007) has highlighted a historical place

where Americans' distinctive attitude toward survey data began by juxtaposing it with

what a Frenchman was reported to think of social surveys:[5]

> As one Frenchman relayed to a journalist during the outbreak of Muslim youth riots in Paris in late 2005, many of his compatriots believed that "surveying by race or religion is bad, it's dirty, it's something reserved for Americans and…we shouldn't do it here." He continued by musing, "But without statistics to look at, how can we measure the problem?" Although disavowing the impulses behind survey knowledge, this man acknowledged that numbers allow societies to track inequalities and gaps, to apprehend things they have no other easy way of knowing.
>
> Who are we? What do we believe? Where do we fit? Social surveys entered Americans' lives promising to answer these questions. The truth is what we still want to know. And so statistical struggles over how to aggregate and disaggregate the United States will remain with us. And we will continue to live in a world shaped by, and perceived through, survey data. (pp. 298-299)

Note that whereas the Frenchman sounds queasy about a world defined by numbers,

especially about the abstract categorization of people it presupposes, Americans seem to

embrace it as an enlightening source of desired information, without fearing the

supervening cruelty of categorization, which I interpret is a characteristic of American

data culture.

Among historians' works related to American data culture, however, Porter's abovementioned work is the single most important precedent of the comparative research of which this paper is a beginning. For it shows different places occupied by social data in various liberal democracies and explains the differences in terms of political culture. Nonetheless, this paper is more interested in the historical origin of American data culture than Porter's, with a deeper scope that includes a gaze at the whole Western civilization in the spirit of Lovejoy's (1936) history of ideas. More specifically, this paper is asking a question of how the radical egalitarian streak of American democracy that came out of the Revolution and settled down decisively during Thomas Jefferson's presidency was related to the emergence of American data culture. Although Cohen (1982) provided a comprehensive picture of how Americans of the early republic had gotten familiar with numbers while emphasizing the fact that they had overlooked the politics behind the numbers production, this paper will highlight the connection between the emergence of American data culture and the contemporary intellectual context in which, as the primary governing faculty to control passion, Platonic reason was replaced by interest.

Another question this paper attempts to answer is of what perpetuated the new data-related customs of *a calculating people* that Cohen's (1982) book describes emerged in the early 19th century America mainly thanks to the republican politics of the newly born American democracy and the explosive expansion of market economy. Below I will show that along the line of what James Madison suggested in framing a modern democratic order, American people of the early republic created a prototypical cultural scene where numerical data were prized over partisan interests. And thereafter, it would recur over and over again: for example, during the Progressive Era when the "American-

style social investigation" which Igo (2007) has underscored as a historical reason why

social survey took "distinctive career" (p. 15) in the US was rather firmly established.

"Kennedy's Finest Moment" Followed by a Survey: A Typical Scene

A characteristic exhibition of American data culture that is too natural to be reflected

upon explicitly while an issue is recognized, defined, and shaped under its influence took

place right after one of the critical moments of civil rights movement on June 11, 1963.

In a nationally televised speech which a recent article of *The New York Times* referred to

as "Kennedy's Finest Moment," President Kennedy announced that he would introduce

comprehensive civil rights legislation, coupling the ordeal of African-Americans to a

question of the nation's identity (Joseph, 2013). From the viewpoint of data culture, an

even finer moment came in the same month when he ordered a survey on racial equality:

> By spring 1963, civil rights demonstrations had reached an intensity that
> compelled a response from Washington. Recognizing that the time had come for
> action, Kennedy went on national television and in a largely impromptu speech,
> eloquent in its moral passion, called for the substantial civil rights legislation that
> eventually became the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Significantly, in the same month
> he instructed his aides to draw up legislative plans for the war on poverty, an
> action reflecting the connection between racial and economic equality that had
> emerged from the civil rights struggle. Indeed, the initial impetus for the war on
> poverty was a consequence of a survey of black economic conditions that the
> president had ordered in search for more information on racial equality. (Chafe,
> 1997, p. 166)

Making recourse to objective data, the president tried to move the focus of

national conversation on race to a nonpartisan space. If successful, his policy proposals

based on the survey data would have been judged no less nonpartisan than the universal

ideals that appeared in the televised speech. Historically speaking, his strategy resembled

that of the reformers in the Progressive Era, when partisan politics was shunned in favor

of "American-style social investigation" (Igo, 2007, p. 15) that gathered supposedly ideology-free, nonpartisan facts for finding practical solutions. Furthermore, the president's order on survey was a prescient move that went beyond the limit of rights-based liberalism, preparing the war on poverty with objective data. In the effort of the Kenney administration to gather information on economic equality between races after the critical speech, I observe one of the typical scenes where an American habit of mind has responded to a problem or crisis in a way prescribed by the cultural tradition. And I believe what has led to recurring of such typical scenes should be located at the core of American data culture.

Throughout U.S. history, similar scenes where numbers have been given priority have appeared frequently enough to be seen integral to the nation's culture—from the Frederick J. Turner's famous 1893 article on frontier in American history, which starts with drawing upon 1890 Census data (Turner, 1921, p. 1), to a discussion of how conservative evangelicals have asserted their hegemony over liberal theology, to the recent innovation of shifting fielders' positions based on statistics in the baseball game. That is, either in justifying a demarcation of historical era, or in judging which religious faith is more persuasive, or in employing innovative tactics in sports, Americans have looked into numbers—one of the first things Americans are culturally disposed to summon when defining or addressing an issue. In the next two sections, I trace the emergence of this cultural disposition from a colonial period of American history when numbers did not matter so much as today yet. In so doing, I emphasize a historical context illuminated originally by Lovejoy (1936) in which Platonic reason lost its traditional dominance over unruly passion, with a cultural opportunity created for radical

egalitarianism of the American Revolution, to substitute people's common sense for

aristocratic reason as the governing faculty of the new republic. This paper asserts that

this cultural substitution that was made explicit in the James Madison's Census proposal

established the cultural pattern of American data culture.

The Theology of Numerical Expansion

In the hierarchy of Christianized Platonism, invisible ideas have been privileged over

what can be physically seen and counted (Lovejoy, 1936). This section focuses on the

cultural transformation that overturned the Platonic hierarchy, which eventually resulted

in a theology where numbers play a critical role. Recently, an article in *The Wall Street*

Journal, which showed that theology to be still active in American mind, discussed a

recent trend among Christian evangelicals to further distance themselves from politics in

"a fallen world," while illuminating its context:

> "The religious right was born on *the theology of numerical expansion* [emphasis
> added]: the belief that conservative churches grow while liberal ones die. That
> conceit is gone now," says David Key, director of Baptist Studies at Emory
> University's Candler School of Theology. (King, 2013)

In other words, the primary reason that has motivated the shift away from politics has

come less from a change of heart than from a change in numbers. However, this state of

affairs has not been always the case, which becomes evident when the quote is contrasted

with the following excerpt from Samuel Grainger's 1722 pamphlet *The Imposition of*

Inoculation as a Duty Religiously Considered. Cohen (1982) used this example to explain

how numbers were interpreted in the Bostonian's religious mind:

> Arguments of Example, Number, and Success, are very insufficient, though
> supported with Testimony of the News Paper…. To bring Armies of Africans and
> Troops of Mahometans [As Mather had done], to prove it lawful by their Success

with it, is like their proving the Religion of Mahomet as true Religion, because successfully propagated…by vast numbers. (as cited in Cohen, 1982, p. 98)

Whereas numbers have long worked as the critical criterion in deciding which denominational theology sounds right or more persuasive to date, it was not the case in the early 18th century, a few decades before the American Revolution, as is shown by the above quote. At the time, inner conviction overrode numbers, which were not counted on as a practical tool or credible evidence. Represented as God's will, even epidemic death was not to be shunned according to the religious opinion of the Bostonians in Grainger's camp that practically prevailed over the advocates of inoculation against smallpox (Cohen, 1982, pp. 94-99). Even among those who drew numbers as compelling evidence to support inoculation efforts, it was less arguments based on science than those based on theological persuasion and its authority that gave cultural legitimacy to the statistical pattern found in large numbers. It was by being presented as a proof to show God's benevolent providence that numbers were empowered to rival the Calvinist cultural force of fatalism. Yet the possibility that inoculation efforts might go against God's will still irked the conscience of pro-inoculation ministers (Cohen, 1982, pp. 98-99). Here, Carey's (1989) following lines ring all too powerful:

> We not only produce reality but we must likewise maintain what we have produced, for there are always new generations coming along for whom our productions are incipiently problematic and for whom reality must be regenerated and made authoritative. Reality must be repaired for it consistently breaks down: people get lost physically and spiritually, experiments fail, evidence counter to the representation is produced, mental derangement sets in—all threats to our models of and for reality that lead to intense repair work. Finally, we must, often with fear and regret, toss away our authoritative representations of reality and begin to build the new world. (p. 30)

Henceforth the dominant Calvinist web of culture where the number of souls to be saved was fixed with such human efforts as inoculation to change the individual lot

interpreted as hubris was soon to be replaced by a popular theology that embraced

personal yearning to change the given lot through relentless self-betterment. Accordingly,

the statistical pattern found in large numbers would be accepted as Savior's gift to be put

to humane use. Along this cultural change, American Christianity, especially its

evangelical wing came to look almost like deism in embracing Newtonian science based

on numerical data—something God was believed to have planted in nature benevolently.

On the flip side of this cultural change, even religious truth was to be social truth whose

value depends on the number of believers and converters—the beginning of *the theology*

of numerical expansion. By the mid-19th century, Hofstadter (1963, p. 86) told us, the

number of saved souls became the critical measure of success among the American

denominational churches. According to Hatch (1989), this fundamental shift toward

egalitarianism that made American churches rely far less on sophisticated theological

arguments than charismatic preachers and effective venues of communication came from

the historical process following the American Revolution, the Jeffersonian ideal of which

denied the privilege of learned class vehemently while praising the natural virtue of

ordinary people enthusiastically. Subverting the traditional aristocratic hierarchy, the

Revolution was truly radical not only in political and economic terms but also in cultural

terms.

Neither Passion Nor Reason But Common Sense

In his study of the American Revolution, Wood (1991) described the traditional hierarchy

to be capsized by the new political order in terms of *the great chain of being*:

> In the eighteenth century, as in the time of John Winthrop, it was nearly
> impossible to imagine a civilized society being anything but a hierarchy of some

kind, in which, in the words of the famous Calvinist preacher Jonathan Edwards, all have "their appointed office, place and station, according to their several capacities and talents, and everyone keeps his place, and continues in his proper business." In such a society it was inconceivable, unnatural, for inequality not to exist.

> Order is Heav'n's first law; and this confest,
> Some are, and must be, greater than the rest,
> More rich, more wise …
> The hierarchy of a monarchical society was part of the natural order of things, part of that *great chain of existence* [emphasis added] that ordered the entire universe, part of what John Adams called that "regular and uniform Subordination of one Tribe to another down to the apparently insignificant animalcules in pepper Water." (p. 19)

In other words, the semiotic order of 18th-century America was couched in terms of the great of chain of being, the origin of which Lovejoy (1936) showed goes back to Plato's dialogues, specifically, *Republic* and *Timaeus*. Despite the Federalists' best efforts, this symbolic hierarchy would be discarded in the aftermath of the Revolution in favor of the radical egalitarianism. The lines of verse in the above quote that summarize the traditional symbolic order was culled from Pope's *Essay on Man*, another phrase from which has made the title of Niclole Eustace's influential 2008 book, *Passion is the Gale*. In the 18th century, Pope appeared everywhere.

Eustace's book that emphasizes the revolutionary roles emotion played begins with the following quote from the 18-year-old Pennsylvanian Joseph Shippen's commonplace book:

> All Passions in general are planted in us for excellent Purpose in human Life. Stoical Apathy is not a human Virtue. Agreeable to this Mr. Pope speaks in his Essay on Man, Epist. 2.—viz.
> Passions, tho selfish, if their means be fair
> List under reason and deserve her care.
> …
> In lazy apathy let stoic boast,
> Their virtue fixed, 'tis fixed in a frost,
> Contracted all, retiring to the breast;
> But strength of mind is exercise not rest;

> The rising tempest puts in act the soul,
> parts it may ravage, but preserves the whole.
> On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,
> Reason the card, but *passion is the gale* [emphasis added].
> (as cited in Eustace, 2008, p. 4)

Here, Eustace argues that positive views on passion, whose wide diffusion would prime the extremely enthusiastic readership of Paine's *Common Sense*, were not rare at all in the 18th century. However, in terms of the pre-revolutionary semiotic order, the reason why passion was sung praiseworthy was that each and every existence in the plentiful world God created perfect was seen to have a rationale and value for the whole that should not be abandoned, however low its place may be in the great chain of being (Lovejoy, 1936). In the eyes of Pope who was not radical enough to turn that traditional semiotic order on its head, passion should ultimately be tamed under and cared for by reason, although recognized for its own worth due to being a part of God's perfect creation. Passion, traditionally seen as something negative, was not liberated from the rein of reason yet. That liberation was put off until the advent of German Romanticism. On the other hand, Eustace's (2008) lack of efforts to contextualize Pope's and his readers' ambivalent position on passion in the long history of the great chain of being is underscored by her dissent with Bernard Bailyn's interpretation of Paine's *Common Sense*.

Whereas Bailyn (1992, pp. 17-18) viewed the pamphlet's emotional intensity as something alien to the calm style of American writing which was still faithful to the traditional semiotic order, Eustace argued that the famous pamphlet had not been imported abruptly but deeply rooted in Pennsylvania's emotional culture. The enthusiastic reception for the pamphlet across America was therefore an indigenous

development for the Revolution (Eustace, 2008, pp. 586-587). However, I am instead

sympathetic to Bailyn's (1992) emphasis on the calmness of American writing, not least

because it sits far better with the historical fact that Revolutionary leaders were deeply

shocked in the aftermath of the Revolution by the degree to which radical egalitarianism

came to disrupt the traditional notion that republican leadership be trusted to the

disinterested gentlemen of aristocratic virtue. According to Wood (1991), American

society got closer and closer to the Anti-Federalists' vision of commoners than that of

aristocratic Federalists after the Revolution.

Specifically, Wood (2011, p. 18) asserts that although the Anti-Federalists lost the

short-term fight over the Constitution, their egalitarian vision prevailed in the long-term

struggle over the nation's character. In parallel, reason's leading status in the human

psyche became vulnerable, not least because its distribution among the people was then

believed uneven. Accordingly, the Scottish Enlightenment, also known as the Common

Sense School, grabbed intellectual hegemony in antebellum America, privileging

common sense over reason, and the privileged common sense was associated with

sensations and sentiments that were seen as shared by all human beings equally (Bryson,

1945; Noll, 1985). Note that this cultural change consequently put reason in a radically

altered context where its Platonic meaning could be sustained no longer because it

obliterated the hierarchical difference between what reason was supposed to deal with

and what sense was deemed to be able to grasp. By the way, the traditional difference

between sense and reason embedded in the great chain of being is nicely illustrated in the

following lines that Lovejoy (1936) quoted from Charles Bonnet's elaboration of

Leibnizian conception of the ever-evolving progressive universe, published in 1770:

Accustomed as we are to judge of the reality of things by the appearances which strike our senses, we are unwilling to admit that anything exists in the world except matter, since we see only matter. And, to borrow the words of a modern author, since all the modifications which our senses observe in Nature consist simply in the variation of the limits of extension, as soon as we are compelled to give up this extension we seem to be confronted with mere nothingness; we come to stop as if there is naught beyond. We do not give heed to the fact that the material or visible world is an assemblage of phenomena and nothing more—that there must necessarily be an invisible world, which is the foundation, the subject, of the visible world, and into which we ought to resolve all that is real and substantial in Nature. (as cited in Lovejoy, 1936, p. 283)

In all, this section shows what we have witnessed above in the beginning of the theology of numerical expansion recurs in the transformation of the view on human nature—a radical conversion of cultural semiotic order toward confirming the faith that all human beings are created equal. Whereas the previous section has described the cultural change as having transformed the values attached to what can be seen and counted, this section shows the same cultural change substituted common sense for Platonic reason as a human faculty to rein passion. This substitution, however, was not to be seen so much disruptive as constructive. For one thing, universal common sense was expected to work as a new cultural bond that would help citizens of the new republic preserve the Union, for example, by keeping divisive political factions at bay. According to Cohen (1982, p. 155), it was the emergence of partisan politics in the 1790s through which nonpartisan social facts and figures gained critical importance. In coping with the disruptive possibility of cacophonous factions, Americans who followed in the footsteps of Scottish intellectuals also came to believe that the intellectual basis for social justice and welfare should be sought in none other than facts (Bryson, 1945, p. 52). In this respect, James Madison's thinking went farther than any other of his contemporaries did in devising institutional strategies to address the issue of faction, which was bundled up

with how to define and secure common good in the new republic. Indeed, the notion of common good was to undergo a major transformation, in that virtuous gentlemen would no longer be qualified to grasp it exclusively. Instead, the people, born with common sense, would be empowered to do it with numerical facts collected (Wood, 1991), the habituation of which would perpetuate the American data culture.

The Final Station of Inquiry: Madison's Census Proposal

By the early 19th century, Americans had become obsessed with collecting numerical facts, and there emerged a consensus that the accomplishment of human science was tantamount to a collection of facts that could speak for themselves (Wood, 1991, p. 360). Yet over thirty years, Congress had frustrated Madison time and again by putting aside his Census proposal to gather occupational data additionally about three categories of interests—agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing—until 1820 Census (Anderson, 1988, p. 14; Cohen, 1982, pp. 159-164). The basic idea embedded in this proposal for the first national Census of 1790 was that although the institutionally designed balance of partisan interests previously discussed in the Federalist papers would defend the common good of the extended republic in an innovative way, it should be adjusted continuously to reflect the society as it was. Here I find three political insights that shaped distinctively American data culture: First, chosen as a republican foundation of political order, interests that allow common sense to calculate are stronger than passion; second, to secure the common good, partisan interests should be continuously balanced to reflect the different growth rates of distinct interests; and third, such nonpartisan acts of balancing should be performed in such a convincingly neutral and persuasively compelling way as

may be done in arithmetic demographic calculation. On the other hand, my attribution of

these three insights to Madison's Census proposal is supported by such characteristic

moderation of Madison's as is showcased in the middle of Wood's (1991) assertion that

Madison's conception of the idea to bring back a monarchical element into the republic

shows how deeply the egalitarian swing of the Revolution had disillusioned a large

number of revolutionary leaders:

> In fact, Madison hoped that the new federal government might restore some
> aspect of monarchy that had been lost in the Revolution. In monarchies, he said,
> the king was sufficiently neutral toward his subjects, but often he sacrificed their
> happiness for *his avarice or ambition* [emphasis added]. In small republics the
> government had no selfish will of its own, but it was never sufficiently neutral
> toward the various interests of the society. The new extended republic, said
> Madison, was designed to combine the good qualities of each. (p. 255)

Note here that the king's "avarice or ambition" that Madison regarded as prone to

ruining his people is one form of the passion that Pope praised as the gale in his *Essay on*

Man. Actually, the caution against monarchy's ruinous passion had a prominent place in

the political thoughts of Madison's contemporaries. According to Wood (2011, p. 220),

the critical reason that both Jefferson and Paine hated monarchy was that they deemed it

as a greedy promoter of war. In the semiotic web Madison shared with his

contemporaries, moreover, human nature broke down into three components: reason,

passion, and interest. All three would later collapse into a single category of economic

interest in the work of Adam Smith who belonged to the Common Sense School, but in

the meanwhile, 18th century intellectuals such as Montesquieu and James Steuart hoped

the calculus of interest would serve as a bulwark of common good against monarchy's

perilous passion (Hirschman, 1975). By then, while reason was seen as following

passion, interest seemed strong enough to lead. In other words, in the traditional place of

reason, interest was supposed to tame and moderate passion. Consequently, Montesquieu and Steuart placed their hope on market economy to rein the monarchy's war-mongering passion because they believed the market kept from disruption fell in with monarchy's own interest, which they expected to govern its perilous passion well enough. But the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars dashed their hope (Hirshman, 1975, p. 113).

On American soil, however, a hope similar to theirs survived critically due to what Thomas Jefferson termed the "revolution of 1800," which wired the hatred of monarchy's war-mongering passion and the trust in ordinary people's common sense into a political reality of exceptionally limited government. In different historical contexts thereafter, an American political ideal would recur repeatedly, namely that citizens should be allowed to pursue their own interests liberally while republican government should play the role of neutral umpire to judge where to strike a balance among them justly. And the supposed-to-be-fair procedure of getting at such just judgments would have to be as compelling as steps in arithmetic calculation. Americans would always remain optimistic about God's benevolent providence or something equivalent to it, suggesting that common sense should be enough to determine a practical solution for any issue once relevant facts are sufficiently gathered.

Having traced the intellectual and historical trajectory of American data culture thus far, McKormick's (1997) following summary of the reform method of the Progressive Era, whose evangelical ethos he described as turning to mission of saving cities from sin, seems to me quite relevant:

> Progressivism owed much of its success to a distinctive method of reform, variations of which were adopted by the leaders of nearly every cause. They typically began by organizing a voluntary association, investigating a problem, gathering relevant facts, and analyzing them according to the precepts of one of

the newer social sciences. From such an analysis a proposed solution would emerge, be popularized through campaigns of education and moral suasion, and—as often as not, if it seemed to work—be taken over by some level of government as a public function. Behind this method of reform lay a confidence that social science offered the means for remedying the conflicts of an industrial society. If the facts were gathered and properly understood, reforms could be found that genuinely benefited everyone. (p. 122)

In the Progressive Era, the traditional American optimism based on the belief in God's benevolent providence morphed into the optimistic confidence in social science. Yet that change was not revolutionary but evolutionary, for the underlying cultural logic of American data culture that called for gathering facts diligently did not change after all. Once again, it was believed that a practical solution would emerge from the facts for any issue.

Throughout American history, communication as culture has over again repeated communication as transmission that Carey (1989) told us had roots deep in evangelical passion. And I from South Korea now feel myself ready to converse—feeling like having found my feet—with Americans, in the spirit of Geertz's (1973) cultural interpretation, about what was going on with Carey's (1989) conceptualizing communication both as transmission and as culture when he began it with interpreting the evangelical experiences of Americans. Following his lead, this essay has found that it was American Christianity that provided American data culture with the religious optimism and helped it maintain its egalitarian configuration. Furthermore, what American communication as culture has ritually repeated and American communication as transmission has stretched globally so far, I now believe, includes the political ideal of liberty based on egalitarian trust in common sense to hear facts speak for themselves and the political insights rooted in Madison's calm spirit of moderation. With respect to American data culture, the

political ideal and insights were discernably articulated and ingrained into the new

nation's future to recur over again, among others, by the Census proposal to gather

occupational data, finally incorporated for the first time in the schedule of the 1820

Census. And I believe that this incorporation signified a consequential cultural change

that finally embraced Madison's political philosophy, especially his view on the limited

government of interest-driven free people and how it should work with numbers. Thus as

a conclusive remark, 1820 may be said to be the year of origin of the American data

culture.[6]

Epilogue: Kennedy's Survey Order Revisited

Following in the footsteps of Geertz (1973), I plunge again into the same scene—

Kennedy's critical speech followed by a survey—transcribed by the American historian

Chafe (1997, p. 166), in order to understand the American data culture since 1820 in

more depth. Would more systematically generated and publicized data on racial equality

have enabled the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies to achieve something beyond civil

rights legislation? What if data had played a larger role, under the Madisonian spirit? If

so, was something beyond the rights-based liberalism that came out of the Civil Rights

movements possible?

After describing Kennedy's critical speech followed by a survey, Chafe (1997, p.

168-169) asserts that the social and cultural conflicts of the 1970s and the 1980s could

have been moderated if the American government had succeeded in addressing the

critical domestic issues of structural inequality. If a sufficient amount of data on racial

inequality had been amassed and rendered in plain terms before the public, something

scarcely recognized before and simultaneously helpful for forming a more perfect Union

might have been seen to emerge by common sense. If not something spiritually inspiring, at least it might have been something equivalent to what the new availability of SoundScan data did for the music fans whose taste had been ill served before. And something equivalent to what peoplemeters did for advertisers and consumers—linking mutual needs and wants of theirs in a more efficient way than before. In the middle of Cold War, however, this kind of pragmatic gains may have sounded trivial. Indeed, the venerable tradition of American pragmatism was on the wane in the Cold War era, for it lacked the religious conviction the ideological era called for (Menand, 2001).

Nonetheless, the American data culture since 1820 this paper isolates from the historical past has shaped one of the distinctively American habits of mind that have kept the exceptionally radical egalitarianism of the American Revolution alive and well to date in Madisonian equipoise. Better numbers supported by the American data culture have helped American society create a better Pareto optimum or something similar to it, and I conclude that the exceptional growth of peoplemeters panel size for better ratings numbers is just one incident that demonstrates its pervasiveness (Jung, 2009).

Footnotes

[1] See the appendix for the English abstract of the research paper that made the statistical test results public for the first time, presented at the annual conference of the Korean Association for the Survey Research in June 2009 (Jung, 2009). The English abstract is based on the revised-for-publication version of the original conference paper that was submitted to an academic journal run by the same association later in the same year.

[2] Based on information on VR's web page (http://www.videor.co.jp/about-vr/anniversary/main.html#history), accessed on August 21, 2013. Surprisingly, when accessed again on April 22, 2014, the numbers of households were found doubled, supposedly reflecting the size of its households-panel pool rather than the number of households whose viewing behaviors are actually recorded. As for this guess, see the Limits of Present Study and Suggestions for the Future Study section of Jung (2009), the English version of which will appear as another McGannon Center Working Paper.

[3] Historical information on the peoplemeter-households-panel sizes of UK and Germany was retrieved on April 22, 2014, from the followings: http://www.barb.co.uk/resources; http://www.agf.de/forschung/methode/fernsehpanel

[4] See the Conclusion and Discussion section of Jung (2009).

[5] The Frenchman was originally quoted in C. S. Smith's (November 11, 2005) *The New York Times* article: What makes Someone French?

[6] According to Cohen's reminiscence in the preface of the 1999 Routledge edition of *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America*, as a graduate student, she noticed that numbers had discernably begun to frequent around the 1820s and that the mode of such frequency had become regular by the 1830s.

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Appendix

Abstract

Two Ideal Types of Syndicated Audience Research

Sung-Wook Jung

This comparative study explores TV-ad markets in order to discover variables that divide

syndicated audience research into different types. In doing so, it takes advantage of the

worldwide spread of peoplemeter measurement and trend to standardize it globally. After

all, three theoretical propositions are put forward: First, the accuracy of syndicated

research is likely to depend on the size of an advertising market where it is used in

trading audience as commodity; second, methods used in syndicated research are likely to

represent equilibrium its buyers have reached; third, an independent truth-seeking

enterprise to establish itself as syndicated research may create a new Pareto optimum or

something similar to it. As for the first proposition, evidence was found to support two

following hypotheses: Increase in size of TV-ad market is likely to increase accuracy of

syndicated research; increase in size of direct-payment-supported TV market is likely to

decrease accuracy of syndicated research. This study also found evidence to support the

second theoretical proposition and the third one. Especially, it picks out the US and Japan

as promising token cases of the two ideal types that are likely to reveal contingent local

conditions to determine whether more accurate TV ratings expand or shrink TV-ad

market in a nonlinear fashion. This study names the ideal type exemplified by U.S.

market *aggressive-research type* and the other *status-quo-preferred type*.