Being a scholar-activist then and now

Being a scholar now is similar in many ways to being a scholar a century ago, especially for those interested in social justice. When W. E. B. DuBois and other activists in the Niagara Movement of the early 20th-century US wanted to spread their ideas about racial equality and social justice among sympathetic readers, DuBois bought a printing press. In 1905, he began writing, publishing, and distributing *Moon Illustrated Weekly*. Of course, W. E. B. DuBois was also a renowned scholar, a founder of the discipline of sociology, the first African American to earn a PhD at Harvard University (in 1895), and a prolific author of dozens of books that spanned the genres of non-fiction, fiction, and memoir (Morris, 2015). In 1910, DuBois held a faculty position at Atlanta University, but he resigned in order to begin working full-time for the activist organization, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). There his primary responsibilities included writing, editing, and publishing the magazine *The Crisis*. The goal of *The Crisis*, like the earlier but short-lived *Moon Illustrated Weekly*, was to focus attention on lynching and other forms of systemic racism in the US. The analysis in *The Crisis* was intended to spur action to a more just and equitable world (Morris, 2015, p. 136). Guided by DuBois, *The Crisis* reached a wide audience, with monthly subscribers reaching 120,000 just a decade after it began in 1920 (Lewis, 2000, p. 384). In many ways, DuBois, with his prescient purchase of a printing press, foretold what it means to be a scholar in the 21st century. Being a scholar now, in the digital era, means that nearly everyone owns the means to create a document or a media file and a platform to distribute it through the Internet: a global distribution system.
Scholar-activism in the digital era

‘A life of political engagement is so much more interesting than a life of private disengagement and consumption’, observes Frances Fox Piven, a prominent social movements researcher. Pressing social problems prompt many scholars to join forces with activists. Piven says that by ‘connecting with social movements, and developing your research in a way that is responsive to, and sensitive to, the aspirations and indignities that the social movements are preoccupied with’, scholars can begin to address inequality. Developing research in a way that aligns with social movements is one way to do this, and one that Piven has experience with: ‘I’ve done that. I don’t think everybody has to do it, but I think it produces useful scholarship’ (Piven, 2013).

When the Internet changed from one-way, read-only brochure sites to read-write sites where users could add, modify, and create their own content – referred to as Web 2.0, or the read-write web – it changed the architecture of participation, argues Tim O’Reilly. The read-write web is intrinsically designed for participation (O’Reilly, 2004). These changes in web technologies affect research practices as well.

Increasingly, the work of scholar-activists involves combining participatory research and documentary methods (Gubrium and Harper, 2013). For example, in 2013 a group of activists in and around Detroit, Michigan teamed with academic geographers on a project called *Uniting Detroiters: Coming Together from the Ground Up*, supported by the Antipode Foundation, to address problems facing Detroit and to develop collective analysis, reflection and co-research. They combined traditional research methodologies, like oral history and drawing maps that emphasized land justice, with digital activist strategies, such as documentary, that could be shared online and screened at local community centers to increase awareness and foster dialogue in the community. This group of Detroit scholars and activists also sought ways to use open data to further activists’ goals. To accomplish this, they held a ‘Data Discotech’, with scholar-led sessions on using open data to support social change that was billed as a ‘community science fair about open data’ (Campbell et al, 2013). By combining traditional research methods with digital technologies, these Detroit-based scholar-activists were able to reach beyond the academy to engage people in issues of land and data use.

Another example of scholars combining traditional and digital methods for activist goals is *The Morris Justice Project* in the Bronx, part of the Public Science Project. Researchers Brett Stoudt and María Elena Torre developed the project to work with residents living in a
heavily policed New York City neighborhood and created an active social media campaign in solidarity with court cases, legislation, and community organizing related to police reform. Since 2011, Stoudt and Torre have collaborated with residents of the Morris Avenue area of the South Bronx, a neighborhood in the 44th police precinct that then experienced New York City’s highest rate of police stops that led to physical force. They joined together as a research team after each of them grew deeply concerned about the impact of the city’s increasingly aggressive policing that targeted young black and Latino men. Their city-wide study confirmed a disturbing pattern in police harassment with youth (Stoudt et al, 2012, 2015; Stoudt and Torre, 2015; Torre et al, 2016).

Jackie, Fawn and Nadine, women living in the neighborhood, were already using their mobile phones to record police interactions with their children – mostly sons – in order to document the regular harassment they experienced. In a move that combined participatory research with digital media and street theater, the Morris Justice Project teamed up with the Occupy Wall Street artist collective called The Illuminator, who uses ‘spectacular messaging’ in the form of ‘a Ford van with a light projector put to inventive and inspiring use’ (The Illuminator, no date). As a crowd gathered, The Illuminator projected survey results onto a high-rise apartment building, while community researchers read the findings aloud over a mobile public address system (The Illuminator, 2012). Several traditional peer-reviewed research papers emerged from the Morris Justice Project (Stoudt and Torre, 2014; Fine, 2015). Like the scholar-activists in Detroit, those working with the Morris Justice Project combined traditional research methodologies with digital media technologies to promote social change.

Some critics argue that engaging in activism through digital media technologies promotes a shallow and passive form of political activism, disparagingly referred to as ‘clicktivism’ (Karpf, 2010). However, both the Morris Justice Project and Uniting Detroiter are deeply engaged with the political issues identified and embraced by a specific community, one in the Bronx and another in Detroit. These kinds of projects are only possible because of extensive collaborations. The paradigm shifts begun by emerging digital media technologies both enable and create a demand for different kinds of collaborations.
Convergence and collaboration

Scholarship, journalism, and documentary filmmaking have long had practitioners who straddled all these domains. Both W. E. B. DuBois and C. Wright Mills extended the reach of their scholarship by becoming journalists. Converging from another direction in the 1950s, American broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow made social issue films that drew on scholarly research and helped shape the documentary’s focus on injustice.

The proliferation of digital media technologies, and the increasing ease with which multimedia documentary can be produced, means that the products of scholars, journalists, and documentary filmmakers can become increasingly less distinct. Journalism schools frequently offer courses in digital media production; digital journalists possess the skills to craft news stories in multimedia formats. As these endeavors – scholarship, journalism, and documentary – become increasingly engaged with digital technologies, practitioners will collaborate and converge across the traditional disciplinary divisions.

Journalism

‘I’m teach history and I’m often trying to convey to students its immediate relevance to the present – but in Ferguson I could see, very clearly, the way that the fraught relationship between the police and black communities has survived history and become part of the present’, says Jelani Cobb (Queens Library, 2014). He traveled to Ferguson, Missouri after Michael Brown, a young African American man, was killed and after the grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer who killed Brown. Cobb, an associate professor of history at the University of Connecticut, also writes a regular column for The New Yorker magazine, where he reports on issues like the death of Michael Brown and the non-indictment of Darren Wilson. A scholar by training, Jelani Cobb has, like W. E. B. DuBois and C. Wright Mills, become a scholar–journalist to engage with social justice issues. He has also built a lively online presence and makes frequent appearances on network news shows, bringing his scholarly perspective as a historian to bear on conversation about the social issues of the day.

Transformations from legacy, print-only newspapers to born-digital online news are remaking journalism in ways that are both dreadful and promising for the public good (Anderson, 2013). The decline in print
media subscriptions and advertising revenue has led to a dramatic loss of jobs in journalism, and it has especially hurt investigative newspapers and magazine research departments. Journalists, of course, are charged with doing the difficult, challenging work of holding elected officials accountable, offering sustained analysis in the public sphere and informing citizens about social issues.

‘Citizen journalism’ – everyday citizens using digital media to report news as it happens – holds promise for the future of the profession. Citizen journalists can work effectively together with mainstream journalists to make it more difficult for repressive regimes to control online information, but citizen journalism alone is unlikely to be the driving force in promoting social change (Xin, 2010; Khamis and Vaughn, 2012). Today, traditional schools of journalism are refashioning themselves to train would-be journalists in a new set of skills, including videography, podcasting, analyzing large, online, publicly available datasets – sometimes called ‘big data’ – and in data visualization tools, which allow huge, complex datasets to be rendered intelligible by a general audience. While citizen journalism will not save or replace professional journalism, citizens are augmenting the work of professional journalists.

Reading the Riots

When London police shot and killed Mark Duggan in August 2011, people took to the streets across England for three days. ‘Politicians were quick to suggest a root cause – “gangs,” said one, the “feral underclass” said another,’ explains Tim Newburn, a social scientist at the London School of Economics (LSE). ‘But, there was little public deliberation about it and no research’ on which to base such opinions, much less public policy, which was worrisome to Newburn (2015).

When Louis Paul of The Guardian newspaper approached Newburn about an unusual partnership between researchers at the LSE and journalists at The Guardian, Newburn agreed (Devine et al, 2013). Together, they created Reading the Riots (Reading the Riots, 2012), a hybrid form of social science research and investigative journalism. In the short span of 16 weeks, a team of 30 academics and journalists completed 272 in-depth, face-to-face, qualitative interviews with ‘rioters, with police officers, with lawyers, with victims, a huge number of others’, Newburn says. The aim of Reading the Riots was to quickly produce evidence-based research that would help explain the events
that unfolded in the UK in early August 2011. By early December of the same year, they published their results with *The Guardian*.

‘What’s unusual’, Newburn observed in 2013, is that ‘there isn’t, still, a single, standard, traditional, academic publication from this study. Everything that’s been published thus far has been published via the newspaper, either online or in the newspaper itself’ (Newburn, 2015). Since then, Newburn has published several traditional academic papers on the topic, but the strategy to begin with *The Guardian* upends the conventional academic practice (Newburn, 2015).

As Newburn explains it, the traditional way that research projects like this one work is that scholars: ‘dream up a project, hopefully raise the money, do the research, hope it’s empirically sound, write it up, and then, right at the end, hope that you can get it out there in some way. So, now how am I going to get an audience for this thing?’ (Newburn, 2015). The partnership with *The Guardian* gave Newburn the assurance that he would not need to worry about audience or whether the research, once completed, would be a news story. ‘I never worried that it would be a story. It was obviously going to be a story, it was being run by a news organization’ (Newburn, 2015; original emphasis). The reach provided by *The Guardian* news organization was huge, not just by academic standards, but by any measure.

‘Our reach through radio, TV, a variety of other media, to opinion formers, politicians and the public generally, was massively enhanced through working with a news organization’, Newburn explains about the partnership (Newburn, 2015). *The Guardian* estimates that they reached between 50 and 60 million people – staggering when compared to typical readership for traditional academic writing, usually in the low hundreds. ‘In terms of media coverage, we had 30-odd pages in *The Guardian*, and in a variety of other print media across the world, not just in the UK’, Newburn recounts, and ‘50 media interviews just on the launch day itself’. *Reading the Riots* also reached some in the highest levels of government in the UK, including the Home Secretary, the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Home Secretary, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Newburn and Paul presented evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee, to the Victims and Communities Panel that had been set up by the British government, and won several awards in both higher education and journalism.

In assessing the project, Newburn sees advantages and challenges in the partnership. Along with the reach to an enormous audience, *The Guardian* provided access to world leaders and politicians, as well as to the less powerful. The challenges, he notes, are related to what he calls
‘cultural differences’ between academics and journalists. These have to do with the pace of work, flexibility and what he calls a ‘can do’ attitude among journalists that he identifies as missing among academics. He says that academics are behind the curve when it comes to producing other forms of media. In Reading the Riots, there are ‘films, podcasts, a whole variety of other stuff, but nothing that looks like everyday, traditional social science … we’re way behind news media organizations in the things that they can bring to bear in those fields. And we have a lot to learn’ (Newburn, 2015; original emphasis).

The collaboration that made Reading the Riots possible was one that brought scholars and journalists together to look at a pressing, and current, social issue. Scholars are also beginning to work in close collaboration with documentary filmmakers.

**Documentary filmmaking**

Documentary filmmaker Dawn Porter sees many opportunities for collaborating with academics. ‘If someone has written extensively about a topic, often you know the people that have really good stories. At the research stage, there’s a great opportunity for collaboration’, she says (Knoblauch, 2014). Documentaries are situated at the intersection of two important shifts: the lower barriers to the means of production and the changing distribution patterns. Today, there are simply more documentary films produced due to the rise in the independent and documentary film industry, driven by the lower production costs of digital video cameras and digital editing suites (Daniels, 2012). Traditionally trained academics who are concerned with social issues see great potential in documentaries as a medium for raising awareness about difficult subjects with a wide audience (Daniels, 2012; Andrist et al, 2014). For instance, a landmark collaboration in the US between the National Institutes of Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and HBO (a cable channel that primarily offers feature films for paying subscribers) produced The Addiction Series (2007), an award-winning collection of documentary films by some of the leading directors in the field (Bauder, 2007). The ascendancy of the documentary has led some critics to suggest that we are experiencing a ‘golden age’ of documentary, and it certainly is a heyday for scholars with the will and the desire to collaborate with filmmakers (Hynes, 2012).

Filmmakers rely on grants to fund their work, often from the same funders who underwrite more traditional academic work. This can
stimulate collaboration. ‘That’s a really good collaboration, finding someone who will read over your submission to the NEH, or National Endowment for the Humanities. It’s really critical’, Porter explains. Filmmakers need to demonstrate to foundations and other funders that they are connected to the leading experts about the topic they are working on. This means that at the research and writing proposal stage in documentary filmmaking, ‘there’s a great opportunity to work together with academics who are interested in being storytellers’, says Porter (Knoblauch, 2014). There are many other kinds of collaborations between scholars and filmmakers, as well.

*Pink Ribbons, Inc.*

‘The idea of a documentary had not crossed my mind,’ recalls Samantha King discussing the aftermath of her book, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* (King, 2015). She just knew that she wanted to reach the widest audience possible with her critical take on the breast cancer industry. Then, filmmaker Ravida Din read the book. Din was drawn to the material because of her own experience with breast cancer and because of a long history as an activist.

Din called King, asked if she would sell the rights to the book and if she would like to act as a consultant on the film. ‘I said yes right away’, King recalls. She says that her main goal with the project – both the book and the documentary – is to ‘engage a wider public in a critical conversation about the breast cancer industry’. The film made that possible in ways that her academic book couldn’t. ‘I’m sure that more people saw the film on the day it premiered in movie theatres than will ever read the book.’ In addition to the theatrical release, King points to the reach of digital distribution, which has ‘changed drastically from when the work first began’. Online video streaming services such as Netflix and iTunes have garnered whole new audiences for the work. The producer of the film, National Film Board of Canada, also makes it available online.

In all, it was a successful collaboration of scholarship and documentary filmmaking. ‘I was so lucky to work with Ravida and the director, Lea Pool, both of whom I trusted implicitly’, King reports. ‘I didn’t expect to be included in that way, but I’m grateful that I was’ (King, 2015). Both the book and the film, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, are widely used by scholars, by community activists and in college classrooms. Yet, as much as the book and the film overlap, they also make distinct contributions.
‘The book makes a contribution to the academic literature on breast cancer, women’s health, neoliberalism, and social movements as well as perhaps to conversations in breast cancer and public health advocacy and activist circles’ (King, 2015). On the other hand, the film presents many of the same themes but with greater visual and emotional richness. ‘I think the filmmakers did a great job of emphasizing both the affective and political dimensions of the pink ribbon movement’, says King (King, 2015).

Whether in large projects like the journalism–scholarship collaboration that became Reading the Riots, the documentary adaptations of a scholarly book into a documentary film, like Pink Ribbons, Inc., or in smaller moves like an individual scholar writing for a popular news outlet, such as Jelani Cobb, or collaborating with a filmmaker on writing a grant, digital technologies are enabling journalists, scholars, and filmmakers to work together in new ways.

Our experiment: reimagining scholarly communication

‘Probably my biggest angst about being an academic is that question of whether or not it makes a difference beyond just your students in the classroom’, Melissa Harris-Perry said during a 2012 interview (Folkenflik, 2012). If we were to imagine a 21st-century counterpart to W. E. B. DuBois it might very well be Harris-Perry. She is a respected scholar, a professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, an activist, and the host of an eponymous weekend talk show on the MSNBC news network. Calling Harris-Perry ‘the foremost public intellectual today’, Ta-Nehisi Coates describes her show this way: ‘[it] brings a broad audience into a classroom without using dead academic language and tortured abstractions’ (Coates, 2014). Harris-Perry’s weekend morning show routinely featured two hours of scholars, activists, journalists, and documentary filmmakers from a diverse range of backgrounds discussing the social issues of the day. To increase distribution even further, after the broadcast the show was available as a podcast to download. Sadly, network executives failed to see the value in such an expertly curated and diverse program, and Harris-Perry’s show was canceled in 2016 after a four-year run.

‘One does wonder what would happen if the university would extend itself more productively into the marketplace of ideas’, Ernest Boyer said in his famous remarks on the ‘scholarship of engagement’
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(Boyer, 1996). Boyer conjured a show very much like Harris-Perry’s (20 years before that show aired), when he sought to reimagine the weekend news show of that day, Washington Week in Review:

I find it fascinating, for example, that the provocative Public Broadcasting Service program Washington Week in Review invites us to consider current events from the perspective of four or five distinguished journalists who, during the rest of the week, tend to talk only to themselves. I’ve wondered occasionally what Washington Week in Review would sound like if a historian, an astronomer, an economist, an artist, a theologian, and perhaps a physician, for example, were asked to comment. (Boyer, 1996, p. 25)

What Boyer instinctively knew, and what Harris-Perry has demonstrated, is that there are productive, vibrant, and interesting conversations to be had across traditional lines of journalism or academia and that at least some segment of the public is interested in listening to these. Harris-Perry has extended this a step further, by regularly inviting grassroots activists on to her show for conversation with journalists, scholars of all kinds, artists, and filmmakers.

We drew on Boyer’s idea of bringing together people with different kinds of training and background for a conversation on current social issues and on Harris-Perry’s proof of this concept on her show. We wanted to try to create a series of events that were more like Harris-Perry’s activist news show as a way of reimagining a key element of scholarly communication: the academic conference.

We also wanted to follow the model that the LSE and The Guardian created in Reading the Riots, with ‘films, podcasts, a whole variety of other stuff, but nothing that looks like everyday, traditional social science’, as Tim Newburn put it (Newburn, 2015). We wanted to reimagine academic gatherings in such a way that they could be open and could engage a world beyond those who could attend in person. We wanted to connect people across the silos that we were most interested in – scholars, journalists, and activists – around particular topics.

Along with this, we wanted to re-envision the conventional, and mostly closed, form of knowledge production typical of academic conferences. It is easy to realize in hindsight that this was an overly ambitious set of goals given our capacity, both in funding and in staffing. For the most part, our reach exceeded our grasp, as we attempted many things that turned out to be impossible. Nevertheless, we did produce an innovative series of summits, podcasts and eBooks around social
justice issues, which may serve as useful guides for other experiments to come.

Summits

We hosted a series of summits in order to build connections among scholars, journalists, documentary filmmakers, and activists. Meeting in person, forming a connection in three dimensions and in real time, is crucial to journalism, to documentary filmmaking, to community-engaged activism, and to a good deal of scholarship. We called them ‘summits’ as a way to signal a shift away from the traditional academic conference of reading papers to an audience and to convey the sense that people would be meeting to create something together.

In early March 2013, we held a multi-day summit called Reimagining scholarly communication for the 21st century, to draw together people thinking through how research might be joined with activism through digital media. We invited the creators of an academic conference called Theorizing the web to host their conference at our institution as part of our summit, and several hundred scholars attended a lively day-and-a-half of presentations. To open that to a wider audience, we ensured that each session had a live video feed, and volunteers worked to send live updates via Twitter about what was being presented.

The other days of the summit included an #Occupy Data hackathon in the James Art Gallery, which features a large window opening onto Fifth Avenue, so that anyone passing by could observe the activity. The focus of the hackathon was to examine the socioeconomic patterns of first response to victims of the disaster that was Hurricane Sandy.

In the same gallery space on another evening, we hosted a conversation between artist Natalie Bookchin and scholar Alex Juhasz about their work together using YouTube to disrupt conventional representations of poverty. We also held several hands-on workshops, open to anyone, for those who wanted to get training in specific digital media skills during the summit and at the same location as the other events. We produced a panel discussion about ‘altmetrics’ – or new ways of measuring scholarly impact. We concluded with a plenary about what it means to be a scholar in the digital era.

In April 2013, we convened Resisting criminalization through academic-media-activist partnerships. This summit brought together leading activists, researchers, and journalists in small roundtable discussions about three crucial aspects of criminal justice: stop and frisk; the school-
to-prison pipeline; and public health alternatives to criminalizing drug use. Telling compelling stories through visualizations is a key strategy for scholar-activists using a variety of media forms. An afternoon panel highlighted visualizing big data as a way for journalists, scholars, and activists to make complex data easier to understand by more people. Journalists, scholars, and activists presented interactive maps and large data sets displayed in compelling graphics. On that panel was Sabrina Jones, illustrator of *Race to Incarcerate*, a graphic novel (Jones and Mauer, 2013). Jones’ innovative project is a creative example of reimagining scholarly communication. A gifted graphic artist, Jones takes Marc Mauer’s landmark book of the same name on race, class and the criminal justice system, and renders a ‘graphic retelling’ of this scholarly book (Mauer and Sentencing Project, 1999). All summit participants received a copy of Jones’ book. The evening plenary featured a screening of the documentary film by Eugene Jarecki, *The House I Live In* (Jarecki, 2013). Following the screening, we held a panel discussion with activists Glenn E. Martin (Fortune Society) and Gabriel Sayegh (Drug Policy Alliance), journalist Liliana Segura (*The Nation*), and scholar Alondra Nelson (Columbia University), the author of several works on race, health, and technology.

As with the first summit, we opened this up as much as we could to a wider public. All the panel discussions and the film screening were free and open to the public. We took out advertisements in local neighborhood newspapers in order to draw in more people from communities who are most affected by these criminal justice issues. Although the roundtable discussions were by invitation to scholars, activists, and journalists working on specific areas, we also had a video live stream and live tweeting from these discussions. Overall, we had more than one thousand attendees at the summits; among those were scholars, journalists, activists, and artists who connected across the usual silos of knowledge.

Based on our success with the first two summits, we were invited to partner with New York’s Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) to extend the impact of their groundbreaking report *Blueprint for a public health and safety approach to drug policy* (Pugh et al, 2013). The DPA’s *Blueprint* was the focus of a lead editorial by the *New York Times*, ‘The next step in drug treatment’ (*The New York Times*, 2013). In partnership with the DPA, we co-hosted a third summit at The Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy, University at Buffalo, State University of New York. Once again, we tried to open up this event as much as possible to a wider audience. This time, we did this by creating a podcast series based
on interviews with scholars, activists, and policy makers in attendance. The podcast series was then made available on the DPA’s website.

**Social justice series of eBooks**

For each of the summits, we created an online, social justice topic series that once again brought together activists, journalists, and academics. Rather than the face-to-face energy of the summit, the online topic series featured the work of scholars, activists, and journalists on our project blog. We asked people to write blog posts about the scholarship used in the key court case that had recently ruled that stop-and-frisk was discriminatory. We invited activists who had campaigned against stop-and-frisk to be interviewed for podcasts. We curated dynamic multimedia content from digital journalism, such as interactive maps that displayed the racial disparities of which groups of people were most likely to be stopped by the police. We interviewed filmmakers who screened their documentary at the summit, and we interviewed scholars and advocates who worked together to end the practice. Guest contributors were both people who attended the summit in person and also those who could not attend. One of our goals was to include contributors from each of the main sectors that we aimed to connect: scholars, activists, journalists, and documentary filmmakers.

These took different shapes depending on the focus of the summit. In connection with the first summit, about scholarly communication, we created a social media toolkit for academics (JustPublics@365, 2013b). While the summit highlighted the many ways that digital media technologies are making it easier for academics to connect their research with people, community groups, and movements that are also trying to bring about social change, many scholars we spoke to at the summit were still perplexed about how to use social media. We created the toolkit as a guide for scholars and as a way to deepen and extend the experience of the summit. We made the toolkit available in several digital formats (Pressbooks, Issuu and as a pdf), all freely available to anyone on the web.

All of this content appeared on our project’s blog as individual posts during a specific and limited window of time, approximately one month before or after the summit. As each contribution came in, it was reviewed and edited by the project team. While the series was live, we shared each new contribution through the project’s social media channels in order to keep public attention focused on the issue. At the close of the designated time period for the series, we compiled all
of these posts into one eBook, freely available on the web in multiple formats (for example Issu, PressBooks, pdf, Kindle).

*Imagining New York City after stop-and-frisk* is the eBook that we created for the summit on resisting criminalization (JustPublics@365, 2013a). We created this eBook as a resource for use by activists, journalists, or scholars in the classroom. In it, we compiled a series of posts that had originally appeared on our project website, including: an interactive timeline of the practice; activist interviews and examples of digital storytelling about stop-and-frisk; and interviews with Jamilah King, a journalist who has been covering stop-and-frisk, and with Eli Silverman, a legal scholar and an expert witness in *Floyd et al vs City of New York 2013*, the case that ruled the practice unconstitutional. These different elements, written by project staff and outside contributors, appeared over a period of time, usually a month, on the project blog. Then, at the end of that designated time period, we would compile all the elements into an eBook and distribute that freely to anyone on the web who wanted to read it.

As part of this commitment to sharing knowledge beyond the academy and connecting it to activism, we also created a podcast series that took as its focus scholars working on issues of inequality.

*Focus on scholarship about inequality: podcast series*

One of the key ideas with the summits and with our project as a whole is opening up knowledge through digital media and connecting it to social justice. What might have been called ‘knowledge products’ in a previous era, we conceptualized as ‘knowledge streams’. The idea was to bring people together both through the summits and through the collaborative, openly accessible eBook, and we did this. The larger goal was to reimagine knowledge production, which it did at least for the project team.

As many have pointed out, the idea of knowledge production is tied to 20th-century modes of industrial manufacturing (Davidson and Goldberg, 2010). As an advisor told one of us (Daniels) in graduate school, “If you were going to work at IBM, you would be expected to produce. It’s no different going to work in a university, you have to produce something.” In a previous era, when we were in graduate school, we were encouraged to think of scholars as creating ‘knowledge products’, bound journals and books with finite beginning and end points (the companion, and decidedly mixed, metaphor was about a ‘pipeline’ – ‘always have a paper in the pipeline’). But for us, the
knowledge that we were creating through podcasts, infographics, Twitter, blog posts, and interactive media or digital videos – all available to and intended for a broad audience beyond the traditional boundaries of the academy for use, reuse, comment, and remix – seemed more like ‘knowledge streams’ than finite products. Our ideas flowed outside of the walls of the university.

These knowledge streams are available to a broad audience and are designed to reach beyond the traditional boundaries of the academy to wider publics. For example, we produced a podcast series that featured interviews with scholars doing research on inequality and working toward social justice. Heidi Knoblauch interviewed more than a dozen people, including: Frances Fox Piven, talking about a lifetime of engaged scholar-activism around the rights of poor people; Juan Battle, discussing his large-scale study of over 5,000 LGBT people of color; Margaret Chin, talking about her research with immigrant garment workers in New York City; and Joseph Straus, explaining his work that connects disability studies and music theory (JustPublics@365, 2014b). The podcasts were available in a variety of formats, on our project website, through SoundCloud and iTunes. Over the length of the project, the podcasts were downloaded and listened to more than 540 times – not massive numbers, but a greater reach beyond the academy than most academic articles or scholarly monographs.

Changing the academy

The summits, podcasts, and social justice series of eBooks were successful in many ways. They offered an example of what might be possible if we were to open the academy and connect it to grassroots activism.

They were also failures in some ways. We underestimated the significant disconnect between the pace of ‘Internet time’ juxtaposed to the academic calendar and the slow pace of change within academic institutions. Within two months of the project start, we were fully staffed and hosting our first major summit. We were producing the summits, complex live events, while we were launching the #InQ13 course (see Chapters Three and Four) and the MediaCamp workshops (see Chapter Five). In many ways, our project ran at the pace of a digital media start-up within the context of a legacy academic institution. For many staff on the project, this pace caused problems, as it was too much at odds with the other aspects of their academic life. For other faculty colleagues, the pace and scope of the project was all just too
much. As one colleague, Wendy Luttrell, described it, just one element of the project was ‘*dayenu*’—the word from a song that is part of Jewish Passover celebration, means roughly ‘It would have been enough for us’. The fast pace and varied elements of the project at once were out of step with a traditional academic institution.

Planning and running events, such as the summits, that are creative and imaginatively conceived will often collide with the hard realities of academic buildings. Academic institutions, ours included, often have established protocols and structures that can be resistant to change and challenging to navigate. For example, when we wanted to host one of our events on a Saturday, we learned that the campus building was closed that day and it would require a special dispensation from the provost and an extra fee billed to our grant in order to open it on the weekend. When one of our partners for a summit wanted to help with catering by rolling in a cooler of beverages, we were told that all food and beverages had to go through the approved vendor for catering within the institution. Coolers of any kind were not allowed in the building past campus security. As another example, the auditorium where we held several events has a large sign affixed to the entry doors warning those entering to ‘Please turn off your cell phones’. When we requested the sign be removed because we were trying to encourage people to use their phones to live Tweet the event, that request was met with the stony bureaucratic silence of unfilled work orders (the signs remain up).

The podcasts and the eBooks both met our goal of sharing knowledge beyond the academy and connecting scholars, activists, and journalists, but they, too, had shortcomings. While the Internet makes it possible to share information with anyone, distribution and sustainability of these new forms remains a challenge. We created eBooks and posted them on our project website, shared them through our social media channels and our networks, but people still had trouble finding them without the usual indexing of books done by libraries. The podcasts were hosted on accounts that required subscription fees to maintain. When funding for the project ended, so did the ability to host these audio files. Without an institutional commitment to the series or the content in it, there was no place for them to live within our institution’s IT infrastructure.

The academy resists change. What we learned through our efforts to make change is that resistance is built into the very architecture of campus. We were also reminded that time and space are real, and that academic institutions operate at a different pace and rhythm than Internet start-ups. Yet, for those of us who want to know what might
be possible, the summits, podcast series, and eBooks were a useful experiment in what could happen if we were to open up the academy and connect it to grassroots activism.

**Forward thinking: creating, connecting, collaborating**

From W. E. B. DuBois through to Melissa Harris-Perry, scholars in the 20th and 21st centuries have been interested in finding new ways to create knowledge, to connect to activists, and to collaborate with journalists and others beyond the academy. DuBois’ prescient purchase of a printing press to launch *The Crisis* magazine and Harris-Perry’s weekend cable news show of academics, activists, and journalists both speak to what it means to be a scholar-activist. Being a scholar now, in the digital era, means that nearly everyone owns the means to create a document or a media file and distribute it through the Internet: a global distribution system.

Scholarship that is intended for a small audience of other specialists within the academy and with no connection to the larger social world will continue to have a place in the academy, but there are indications that ivory tower-only scholarship is losing its appeal for many academics. Part of that shift away from cloistered knowledge production has to do with digital technologies. The architecture of participation in the digital era has opened up what it means to be a scholar. People are joining digital research tools with passionate political interests, mixing the methods of digital journalism with traditional methodologies of scholarly investigation. Being a scholar today relies in a fundamental way on the idea of open knowledge production, an idea that encompasses open software, open access journals, and open data. The ethos of openness is inherently tied to activism, in ways that might be unexpected.

Our summits, podcast series, and eBooks were experiments in opening up the creation of knowledge to a wider public. We also designed them to connect scholars, activists, journalists, and documentary filmmakers with each other to foster new collaborations and, ultimately, new knowledge once again.