

As Sarah's driverless car approached her apartment building, she started to think about dinner. But first she needed to adjust her air conditioning. While it was set on a timer to coincide with the time she usually arrived home, it was especially hot and humid today.

"Alexa, turn on the air conditioning and lower the thermostat to 68."

"Sarah, welcome home. I have turned on the air conditioner and lowered the thermostat to 68."

Sarah walked up to her apartment door and waited for the retinal scanner to recognize her. After a second, the door to her apartment opened. It was hot inside but she could hear the air conditioning working.

"Alexa, turn on the downstairs lights. Play news videos. Can you tell me about some options for dinner?"

"OK, Sarah, would you like to order food for delivery, cook or heat something up in the microwave."

Sarah thought about her options. She didn't want to order food or heat up food in the microwave. But it was still hot enough to make her pause at the thought of cooking.

"Alexa, what options do I have that don't require much cooking?"

"Sarah, you have a few options based on the current food items in your refrigerator and cupboards...would you like to make a salad?"

"Maybe. Give me another option."

"If you'd be willing to cook some vegetables, you could make a Bento Box."

A Bento Box. That was an intriguing choice. Sarah recalled the Bento Boxes from her visit to Tokyo. She still marveled at the attention to detail, the perfect balance of flavors, colors and textures. Suddenly she felt nostalgic about her visit to Tokyo.

"I don't have any sushi in the house. What could I include in my Bento Box?"

"You have edamame, lettuce, carrots, oranges, leftover pickled ginger and sesame noodles. If you stir fry some vegetables, I think you'd have a delicious and healthy Bento Box."

"OK. Let's do it."

"Sarah, I need to tell you about a water problem in the house. I noted a slight leak in the water system. It could be as simple as replacing a pipe that appears to be defective. Would you like me to show you?"

"Yes."

Alexa displayed a holographic image of her house pipes with one pipe highlighted in red.

"This pipe may be causing the problem. It would be easy enough for you to access and replace it. Would you like me to print a replacement part for you?"

Sarah contemplated the idea of trying to fix the problem herself. It would be easy enough to print out the part and replace it. But what if that didn't fix the problem. She still had dinner to make and the air conditioning hadn't quite done its job.

"Alexa, is it a serious problem?"

"Define serious."

"How much water is being lost...is it a minor leak?"

"Yes, it is a minor leak in the sense that you could place a pan under the pipe and collect the water."

"Will it get worse?"

"That's difficult to say given that I don't know exactly what is causing the problem but I don't think so."

"Ok, set up an appointment with a plumber that has a rating of at least four stars based on ratings from my friends...someone certified by HomeAdvisor."

"OK. Let me check for a plumber with that rating who has availability on days when you are working from home...I've found a few. How would you like to choose?"

"Choose the one who has the earliest availability."

"OK. I've set up an appointment for April 27th."

Sarah started to prepare her Bento Box and listened passively to the news videos playing in the background.

There was something about that date that struck a chord. Why did that date stick out in her mind?

Of course. It was the anniversary of the Baltimore riots.

Sarah placed a mixture of vegetables and sesame oil into her wok and began to stir fry them. As she tossed them around, ideas and reflections about the riots bounced around in her mind.

She had previously wondered if an analysis of the riots would make a good topic for her report in Africana Studies.

“Alexa, stop playing news videos from today. Find me news videos that relate to the Baltimore riots. Start with local news coverage from April 27th in heads up display mode.”

As Sarah started preparing her Bento Box, she listened to and occasionally looked up at the news clips. At the same time, Alexa started clustering the videos into categories and displaying them in separate windows.

Sarah wasn’t even sure what she was hoping to see or hear but Alexa had started to identify a set of topics for each of the clusters. Sarah focused on the ones labeled “community.”

As she was finishing her Bento Box, Sarah heard the following statement: “I can’t believe they would do this to their own neighborhood.”

“Alexa, stop. Find video with the following phrase.”

“OK. I have found the video.”

“Rewind two minutes and resume play once I sit down at the table. Play the video on the surface of my table.”

As Sarah started to eat, she watched the news video of a neighborhood minister painfully recalling the story of the local community center being set on fire. “I can’t believe they would do this to their own neighborhood.”

Upon finishing her meal, she had two thoughts. First, the Bento Box was good but nothing compared to the ones that had been prepared by chefs in Tokyo. Second, how could the minister be sure that people had rioted in their own neighborhoods?

“Alexa, read the Wikipedia entry on the Baltimore riots.”

“On April 12, 2015, [Baltimore Police Department](#) officers arrested Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old [African American](#) resident of [Baltimore, Maryland](#). Gray sustained injuries to his neck and spine while in transport in a police vehicle...”

As Sarah listened to the entry, she heard accounts of protests near the Inner Harbor and a “purge” (in reference to a movie with the same title) that began near a local mall.

“Alexa, stop reading the Wikipedia entry. Bring up a map that shows all reported protests and riots.”

A map filled up the surface of her table.

“Move map to heads up display. What information are you using to display the nodes on the map?”

“I am accessing information related to news reports, public arrest records and loan applications from the Small Business Administration.”

“Loans from the Small Business Administration?”

“Yes, many businesses filed applications for loans to rebuild their businesses.”

“Can you correlate the location of the riots with home addresses of individuals who were arrested?”

“I’m sorry, Sarah, I can not. Home addresses are private information.”

“Alexa, is there a DBpedia entry for the Baltimore riots?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not sure.”

Sarah needed a different approach.

“Alexa, access the list of scholars I have been compiling for my Africana Studies program...show me the pathways they have followed for research related to the Baltimore riots.”

Sarah started to examine a series of information graphs that outlined the various resources and – perhaps as importantly – the connection between the resources used by her list of scholars. After a few minutes of following the pathways, she noted a pattern of race relations based on location within the city. The African American community in Baltimore had worked closely with the Jewish community in the past. When the Jewish community largely moved to different parts of the city, the partnerships seemed to have faded. There were now questions about whether the

nascent connections between African Americans and Asian Americans within Baltimore might follow the same trajectory.

“Alexa, augment the previous map with locations of businesses owned by Asian Americans that were affected by the riots...now show me news articles related to those businesses.”

Sarah was now immersed in a sea of information whose currents were converging into a confluence...there must be some interesting correlation that would possibly highlight the impact of race relations over time and space...

“Alexa, conduct a search of all content based on race relations and real estate.”

“Wikipedia indicates there is no entry for race relations and real estate...there are many pages listed by individual country including one for the United States...would you like to read that entry?”

“No, keep searching...”

“There are no results in DBpedia...There are 1,360,000 results from Google...There are 23 results from the Digital Public Library of America...There are 21,430 results from Project MUSE...”

“Stop. Focus on Project MUSE...add ‘Baltimore’ to the search criteria.”

“There are now 13,898 results from Project MUSE.”

“Map those results to the pathways from my list of scholars.”

Sarah always appreciated this moment when everything coalesced in her mind. As she navigated the information graphs, she found a series of books that mined African American newspapers such as *The Afro in Baltimore*. These books portrayed individual stories as case studies for various factors that influenced race relations in Baltimore. She could start seeing pathways from these historical accounts to the events leading up to the riots.

As her dishwasher started to clean her dishes, she asked Alexa to start reading one of the books from the Black Press Research Collective. The air conditioning had turned off so she could hear the printer working away to produce one of the books from this Research Collective. She looked forward to sitting down with her favorite cup of tea because sometimes there’s no simply substitute for curling up with a good book.