

Spring 2018

Professor Meredith D. Clark

MDST 3760

#BlackTwitter and Black Digital Culture

Syllabus

What will we learn in this course?

#OnFleek **#GrowingUpBlack** **#OscarsSoWhite** **#WhyIStayed** **#BlackLivesMatter**

Why do certain hashtags, like the ones above, have the ability to shift public consciousness and ignite controversial conversations about contemporary social issues? How do people use social media to create community with one another, elevate marginalized voices, create new media outlets and programming out of (seemingly) nothing, and influence mainstream and niche media coverage of Black communities? Black Twitter stands as a point of entry for this course as we address these questions and apply what we learn to better understand the dynamics of race, media, and power in the Internet Age.

If you show up each day curious, prepared, and ready to work, by the end of this course you will:

1. ... how to interpret technoculture through an intersectional lens, and develop confidence in your ability to discuss pop culture from an informed perspective.
2. Possess the ability to interrogate digital artifacts in order to understand more about the people and cultures that created them, and use that knowledge in your professional life.
3. ... how to locate, analyze, and synthesize multiple sources of data to write mini case studies and produce your own podcast, creating two items that can be used in your online portfolio for internships and job applications.
4. Leave with an elevated sense of awareness about how your identity shapes your worldview (and vice versa), and recognize what that means as you relate to others from different backgrounds.

These assignments are designed to help you meet the course objectives:

Weekly Q&Q - By generating critical questions for in-class discussions and activities based on texts I've assigned and ones you've introduced that are relevant to the course, you'll begin to develop your critical thinking and articulation skills. This assignment rotates (five people do it each week; everyone does it twice during the semester), and is worth a total of 100 points.

Digital engagements - The best way to study culture is to experience it firsthand. Each week you'll try new methods to explore aspects of Black communities, identities and lived experiences in a non-obtrusive way, and relate these experiences to our own knowledge of how the world works in both your personal and professional lives. These activities, which will be completed both during class and on your own time, require you to research, critically analyze, test, use and play with a number of digital platforms, tools and artifacts as a complementing component of your learning experience. The activities bring the theories and concepts you'll learn in our texts to life - often within the palm of your hand. Some of them you'll do on your own; most will require conversation with a partner or small group work.

Group podcast - By producing a podcast episode that considers one or more issues raised (or ones you would have liked to see raised) in our exploration of Black Digital Culture. Your final podcast submission requires you to identify and interview an expert source, develop your chemistry as a podcast host and team, write and execute a compelling, (somewhat) scripted show, and edit audio files for an online audience. Your final score on this assignment depends on your peers' assessment of your contribution to the project.

Schedule

Week 1: Jan. 18 #ForTheCulture: Defining Black Digital Culture

In class: Introduction, syllabus review, course expectations

“Culture vultures” are people who swoop in on certain aspects of a particular culture and use it for their own benefits. They’re often accused of cultural appropriation and exploitation. How can you avoid doing that as we study Black popular culture in this course? How does power impact what we perceive as “culture”?

Before we meet, read this: Hall, S. (1992). “What is this *Black* in Black Popular Culture?” in *Black Popular Culture* Ed. Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 21 -33.

In class: Let’s play a game!

1. Write practice discussion question, submit by noon p.m. on Jan. 22 via UVA Collab
2. Read and review syllabus policies
3. Sign up for discussion question and digital engagement assignment dates (sign up for two of each)

Week 2: Jan. 23 & 25 - What is #BlackTwitter?

In 1997, psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum published her book, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” The book examined place, belonging, and the notion of community in public high schools. This week, we pose a similar question in a social media setting: What are hundreds of thousands of Black users doing on Twitter?

Before we meet, read these:

Ramsey, D. (2015). “[The Truth About Black Twitter](#),” The Atlantic.

Brock, A. (2013). “From the Blackhand Side: Black Twitter as Cultural Conversation”

In class: Twitter, the walk-through method

After we meet, do this:

Week 3: Jan. 30 & Feb. 1 - “It me”: Language & discourse as culture

Stop signs. Wedding rings. Beats by Dre headphones. iPhones. What do they all have in common? And what does that have to do with social media? Find out this week when we learn how to read different codes used online in social media discourse.

Before we meet, read this: Florini, S. (2013). “Tweets, tweeps and signifyin’: Communication and Cultural Performance on ‘Black Twitter’” *Television & New Media*

In class: Concept-mapping Black Twitter hashtags

Week 4: Feb. 6 & 8 - Don’t meet me there, tweet me there: Second-Screening as social gathering and cultural performance

Shondaland isn’t just a three-hour block of primetime television on ABC - it’s a community. What role does Twitter play in creating fandoms and “neighborhoods” out of today’s television audience? Once we discover the answer, you may just learn how to use Twitter to create your own niche in entertainment.

Readings: Chatman, D. (2017). “Black Twitter and the politics of viewing Scandal” in *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world*. Gray, J., Sandovoss, C., and Harrington, L., Eds. New York University Press.

In class: Live-tweeting “Scandal”

Week 5: Feb. 13 & 15 - Special Edition: #BlackPantherSoLit

Beautiful question goes here and herey

Readings: TBD

In class: TBD

**Field trip (optional): Black Panther at Alamo Drafthouse or Regal Stonefield,
Date/time TBD**

Week 6: Feb. 20 & 22 - Black Feminist Thought and the digital self

Beautiful question goes here and herey

Readings: Collins, P. (1994). “Black Feminist Thought” [excerpt] and “The Matrix of Domination.”

In class: Guest speaker

Week 7: Feb. 27 & March 1 - Me, MySelfie & I

You’re so vain. Or are you? Is there more to selfies than #thirsttraps and the#humble brag? How do selfies work as tools for community-building and representation?

Before we meet, read these: Pham, M. T. (2015). I click post and I breathe, waiting for others to see what I see: On #FeministSelfies, outfit photos, and networked vanity. *Fashion Theory, The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. 19(2), 221-241. Read pages 221-234 in the Pham article for Tuesday; pages 235-end for Thursday.

Winfrey Harris, T. (2015). Selfie Shakeup: #BlackOutDay is coming to a timeline near you, *Bitch Magazine*, 67, p. 6. Please read this article for Tuesday’s class.

In class: Selfie analysis

Week 8: March 13 & 15 - Do it for the Vine: GIFs, memes & visual culture

Beautiful question goes here and herey

Before we meet, read these: Huntington, H. (2013). “Subversive memes: Internet memes as a form of visual rhetoric,” in *Selected Papers of Internet Research*, 14.0.

Supplemental readings:

Obell, S. (2016). Here’s why Black people were the true heroes of Vine. Retrieved from: https://www.buzzfeed.com/sylviaobell/mmmohmygodyes?utm_term=.dtpbX1Jz6#.laMoVxYmJ, on Oct. 7, 2017. (*This is a compilation of Black Vines.*)

Hughes, J. (2016). "Vine dries up. Black humor loses a home". Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/arts/vine-jay-versace-black-culture.html?_r=0, on Oct. 7, 2017.

Jackson, L.M. (2017). "We need to talk about digital blackface in reaction GIFs" Retrieved from: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs>, on Oct. 9, 2017. (*Read for Thursday*)

In class: Visual content analysis of memes; select podcast group members

After we meet, do this:

Week 9: March 20 & 22 - Black podcasts: Audio enclaves in digital spaces

Beautiful question goes here and herey

Before we meet, read these:

Florini, S. (2015). The podcast chitlin' circuit: Black podcasters, alternative media, and audio enclaves. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 22 (2), 209 - 219.

Reid, Cleveland, K. (2016) [10 Black podcasts you need in your life](#)

After we meet, do this: Podcast analysis

Week 10: March 27 & 29

Podcast training session, March 27

Podcast working session, March 29

Week 11: April 3 & 5 - The Intersectional Internet

Beautiful question goes here and herey

Before we meet, read this: Tynes, B., Schushcke, J., Noble, S. U. (2016). “*Digital intersectionality theory and the #BlackLivesMatter movement*” in *The Intersectional Internet*, Noble, S. U. & Tynes, B., Eds.

In class: Interviewing our guest speaker(s)

After we meet, do this:

Week 12: April 10 & 12 - #BlackLivesMatter and beyond: Activism and agency

What does it mean to declare “Black Lives Matter”?

Before class, read these: Garza, A. (2014) “A feminist herstory of #BlackLivesMatter”

Freelon, D.; McIlwain, C., and Clark, M. D. (2016). Beyond the Hashtags: Ferguson, #BlackLivesMatter, and the online struggle for offline justice

In class: Create a hashtag activism campaign

Week 13: April 17 & 19 - #RainbowNation: Digital diasporic connections

Beautiful question goes here and herey

In class: TBD

Before we meet, read this: Daye, F., and Christian, A.J. (2017). Locating black queer TV: Fans, producers and networked publics on YouTube. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 24. **And watch an episode of this:**

In class: Webseries analysis

After we meet, do this:

Week 14: April 24 & 26 - Gaming while Black: Race in multiplayer video games

Beautiful question goes here and herey

In class: Designing a game

Readings: Conditt, J. (2015) Gaming While Black: Casual Racism to Cautious Optimism

After we meet, do this: Game analysis

Week 15: May 1 - Afrofuturism: What's beyond the Internet?

What would the Black experience in the African Diaspora look like if the TransAtlantic slave trade had never happened?

Before we meet, read these:

Bennett, M. (2016). Afrofuturism. *Computer*, 16, 33, pp. 92-93.

Womack, Y.L. (2014). *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Lawrence Hill Books. (excerpt)

In class: Designing with an Afrofuturistic vision