#BlackTwitter and Black Digital Culture
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This is an interactive syllabus. Have a question? Post a comment on this document.

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, you will:

1. Develop an ability to interpret technoculture through an intersectional lens, and develop confidence in your ability to discuss pop culture from an informed perspective.

2. Learn to recognize the systems and practices that help Internet users create digital artifacts, and interrogate those items (i.e., hashtags, memes, GIFs, etc.) in order to understand more about the people and cultures that created them, applying that knowledge as a professional communicator.

3. Locate, analyze, and synthesize multiple sources of data to construct 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 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 - You'll begin to develop your critical thinking and articulation skills through this assignment, which challenges you to generate critical questions for in-class discussions based on texts I've assigned and ones you've introduced that are relevant to the course. You can earn up to five bonus points for including links to relevant articles, videos, or other texts that complement your response. *If it's your week to post, please do so by 11:59 p.m. on the Sunday before that week's class.* Five people will submit a Q&Q it each week; everyone will submit two Q&Qs during the semester. A sign-up sheet is available so you can schedule your dates to post. **This assignment is worth 50 points total**.

Weekly discussion responses - This assignment is designed to kick-start our in-class conversations and keep them going after class time has ended. Each person is responsible for responding to one of the weekly Q&Qs five times during the semester. You can earn single bonus point per response for linking to relevant articles, videos, or other texts that complement your response. *If it's your week to post, please do so by 11:59 p.m. on the Tuesday of that week's class.* A sign-up sheet is available so you can schedule your dates to post. **This assignment is worth 50 points total.**

Hashtag analysis - In lieu of a midterm exam, you'll apply some of the theories and concepts we've learned through March 1 (and ones you've learned elsewhere) to write a short research paper tracing and explicating (fancy word for explaining) the origin and use of a Black Twitter hashtag. This assignment includes several in-class activities — including a scholarly research training session, instruction on concept-mapping, and a peer-editing session — as well as independent thinking and some creativity on your part, on your own time. Everyone will complete a hashtag analysis. **This assignment is worth 250 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 (aka engagements), 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. They are all connected to what we learn in class, and other assignments, such as the

hashtag analysis and group podcast. **These activities and assignments are worth 300 points (total).**

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. **This assignment is worth a total of 350 points**.

Detailed information and instructions for each of these assignments is posted on Collab. Each assignment will be discussed in class. You can earn a maximum of 1,000 points for your grade in this class. The grade scale follows the default grade threshold posted by the registrar's office, but is measured on a scale of 0 to 1,000 (simply multiply by 10).

Attendance policy - In many work environments, your daily, on-time presence is required to complete tasks, contribute knowledge and information, and collaborate on long-term projects. There are no points for attendance, just penalties for absences. **To reflect this reality, you will not earn points for attendance, but will lose 10 points per absence after you miss two classes.** If you are or will be absent from class, please send me an email using the subject line: *"MDST 3760: I was absent today"* and let me know. I take attendance daily via several means, including calling/checking the roll, collecting assignments, etc.

Instructor policies - Please use "*MDST 3760: (Subject of your email goes here)*" as the subject line in any email you send me about our course. Using the course code in your subject line helps distinguish important messages from you from the flotsam and jetsam that floods my inbox every day. Please allow up to 24 hours for a response to emails sent Monday through Friday, and up to 72 hours for emails sent on Saturday. I begin checking email around noon, stop checking it around 8 p.m. nightly, and I do not check it at all on Sunday.

Classroom policies - We'll collaborate on these during our second week of class.

Classroom accommodations - It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate any issues related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please meet with me outside of class so we can explore potential options. Students with disabilities may also wish to work with the Student Disability Access Center to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in this course, including official accommodations. Please visit

their website for information on this process and to apply for services online: sdac.studenthealth.virginia.edu. If you have already been approved for accommodations through SDAC, please send me your accommodation letter and meet with me so we can develop an implementation plan together.

Honor System - I trust every student in this course to fully comply with all of the provisions of the UVA honor system. In addition to pledging that you have neither received nor given aid while completing assignments, quizzes, or exams, your submission also affirms that you have not accessed any prohibited materials while completing assignments, quizzes, or exams, and that you have not obtained any answers from other students. All alleged honor violations brought to my attention will be forwarded to the Honor Committee. If, in my judgment, it is beyond a reasonable doubt that a student has committed an honor violation with regard to a given exam, that student will receive an immediate grade of 'F' for that assignment, quiz or exam, irrespective of any subsequent action taken by the Honor Committee.

Basic needs - Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess. (Language via Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab)

Living syllabus - This syllabus is subject to change based on inclement weather, my availability (i.e., research-related travel or absences because of illness), the availability of guest speakers, or current events that inspire updates to the course content. While you are welcome to print a copy of the syllabus, I strongly encourage you to revisit this online document each week for any updates. Updates to the syllabus will also be announced in class and posted in Collab.

Course 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!

After class, do this:

Write practice discussion question, submit by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 21, via Collab.

Read and review syllabus policies

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.

Light, B., Burgess, J., and Dugay, S. (2016). The walk-through method: An approach to the study of apps, *New Media & Society*, pp. 1-20.

Brock, A. (2013). From the Blackhand Side: Black Twitter as Cultural Conversation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 56*(4), 2012, pp. 529–549

In class: Reading Twitter via the walk-through method

After we meet, do this: Upload walk-through reflection by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 28 via Collab.

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* **and watch this:** "How to Create a Concept Map"

In class: Concept-mapping Black Twitter hashtags as signifiers

After we meet, do this: Review list of hashtags for hashtag analysis paper; find one or more hashtags to analyze.

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: Practice live-tweet of "Scandal"

After we meet, do this: Live-tweet a live episode of "Scandal" (or another approved show) as digital engagement via social viewing, and write reflection. Upload by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 11.

Week 5: Feb. 13 & 15 - Special Edition: #BlackPantherSoLit: Fantasy, fandom, and the power of representation

Is creating online hype really labor if fans do it out of love?

Readings: Namu, A. (2009). Brave Black worlds: Black superheroes as scifi ciphers, *African Identities, 7*(2), 133-144.

DeKosnik, A. (2013). Fandom as free labor *in* Digital labor: The Internet as playground and factory. Trebor Scholz, Ed.

In class: Concept-mapping digital fandom

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

Week 6: Feb. 20 & 22 - YOU THOUGHT!: Black Feminist theory

Is it possible to liberate theory from the confines of white supremacy?

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

Cooper, B. (2015). Love no limit: Toward a Black Feminist Future (in Theory), *The Black Scholar, 45(4)*, 7-21.

In class: Guest speaker TBA

After we meet, do this: Finish a draft of your hashtag analysis paper. Upload it by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 25.

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

After we meet, do this: Submit your hashtag analysis paper by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, March 2, via Collab.

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

How do we draw a line between humor and exploitation when seconds-long snippets of people's experiences and images become part of the digital zeitgeist?

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: Guest speaker - Jasmyn Lawson, cultural editor at Giphy. Visual content analysis of memes; select podcast group members

After we meet, do this: Select podcasts for analysis and begin listening/taking notes. Create Lynda.com account via UVA libraries.

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

Do you use headphones to drown out the world while commuting or studying? Where do your ears take you? What does it feel like to experience a world of sound designed specifically for Black audiences?

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: Listen to/watch and take notes on the "Learning Audacity" lesson in Lynda.com. Complete online quiz by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, March 25, in Collab.

Week 10: March 27 & 29

Podcast training session, March 27

Podcast working session, March 29

Week 11: April 3 & 5 - The Intersectional Internet

Sociologist W.E.B. DuBois wrote that "the problem of the 20th century is the color line." From an international perspective, what would you describe as the problem of the 21st century?

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: Guest speaker(s) TBA

After we meet, do this: Complete podcast analysis, upload by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, April 1. This is not an April Fool's joke! :)

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

After we meet, do this: Upload podcast plan by Sunday, April 15, at 11:59 p.m. via Collab.

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

If you cannot be what you cannot see, how might you use digital technology to create hidden worlds you know exist?

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: Use your time to conduct interviews, edit your podcast, etc.

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

Are the games we play online an accurate reflection of who we are — and who we believe others to be?

In class: Designing your own game

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

After we meet, do this: Upload an (individual) game analysis of another group's game by Sunday, April 29, at 11:59 p.m.

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: Design a tool or solution for the problems of the future with an Afrofuturistic vision.

After we meet, do this: Upload a link to your group's completed podcast by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, May 4.