

Beyond the Hashtags

Lecture Notes

COVER SLIDE: Last week, we discussed the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly the creation of the hashtag, and the way it was co-opted by outside groups. We also introduced the concept of “cultural resonance,” which we’ll talk about a bit more explicitly today.

SLIDE 2: Prime the pump: #BlackLivesMatter video (7:48): How a hashtag defined a movement.

SLIDE 3: Today’s objectives: Group 5 discussion; how hashtags “work”; discussion-based activity to connect ideas of agency and activism.

Group 5 leads discussion of reading

SLIDE 4: Open mini-lecture: In our discussion last week, we explored the intersectional nature of the hashtag, and introduced the concepts of “*cultural resonance*,” one of Michael Schudson’s five dimensions of cultural power. Cultural resonance describes how symbols become embedded with meaning and, when they’re used, how they evoke emotional reactions and collective memory. Here’s how Schudson defines cultural resonance.

SLIDE 5: So how do we use this definition to explain how #BlackLivesMatter works as a cultural artifact?

SLIDE 6: When we consider the use of #BlackLivesMatter in online activism, what is the object, what is the tradition, and who is the audience? There can be more than one answer. Let’s take three minutes to think-pair-share and address these questions.

SLIDE 7: Show hashtag as students report out

SLIDE 8: This week we’re going to continue our study of Black Lives Matter by exploring its conceptualization as a tool for agency, amplification and education.

SLIDE 9: From previous readings, including Patterson, Brock and Florini, we know that hashtags serve as symbols that communicate specific meaning to people within a culturally connected community.

SLIDE 10: If signifyin' is a process by which individuals within Black communities creates a space for the expression of cultural knowledge, a vehicle for social critique, and a means of creating group solidarity, then hashtags are the steering wheel that help users drive the conversation in a specific direction. That's the *work* that hashtags perform in these digital spaces, and in offline spaces.

SLIDE 11, ACTIVITY: That said, based on the findings of the report, I want you to work with your podcast group to address the following:

SLIDE 12: How did #BlackLivesMatter give “armchair activists” or everyday people to engage in public social critique? What issues would you say those people raised as part of the critique?

How did #BlackLivesMatter (as a hashtag) create group solidarity between 2014 and 2016? What sort of groups were formed via the hashtag, and what purpose did these groups serve?

SLIDE 13: *Give the groups five to seven minutes to discuss the questions; then spend about 15 minutes reporting out. Call on three groups for each question.*

Beyond the Hashtags

Lecture Notes - Day 2

Earlier this week Group 5 helped us connect the Garza reading to our discussion of how hashtags “work” as cultural artifacts in digital spaces. By interpreting the BLM movement through Black Feminist Thought, we were able to describe the “work” of hashtags via the concept of cultural resonance.

We know that cultural resonance requires an object, a tradition, and an audience. Today we're going to add two more concepts to that mix, and put them into action with the world's shortest hackathon to create a hashtag campaign that addresses the events of Aug. 11 & 12 here in Charlottesville.

But first, Group 6 will lead us in discussion questions about the reading.

Group 6 discusses questions for 15 minutes.

SLIDE 14: There are two concepts that I want you to walk away from this unit on #BlackLivesMatter with: agency and amplification as a part of forming Black digital culture. Applying Black Feminist Thought, we can ground or contextualize the hashtag as the work of Black women (members of an oppressed group), using situated knowledges to develop alternative practices for pursuing racial justice. Digging a bit deeper, the concepts of agency and amplification provide psychological and technocultural explanation for how these practices work when they become part of a culturally resonant hashtag.

SLIDE 15: First, **agency** is the ability for people to act freely and independently of social structures. Those structures can be familial settings, occupational constraints, social expectations, etc. Agency is a noun, it is a *thing* that one has. It brings together who you are and what you do. So think about the agency that people were endowed with as a result of this hashtag. *Tell story about activists who otherwise not be able to participate in the movement. Ask about what would happen if you went home at break and told your family you weren't going back to school.*

SLIDE 16: Second is **amplification**. Amplification is the process by which users brought marginalized voices into the larger conversations within the #BlackLivesMatter movement. This was re-tweeting certain messages, linking to blogs that people might not otherwise see. The #BlackLivesMatter syllabus, like the #Charleston syllabus and the #Charlottesville syllabus are the work of amplification, calling for materials from sources other than legacy media and the texts we read in classes.

These provided the cognitive power and the structural capability for participants who used the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag to engage in education as part of their activism. They brought attention to a common cause, educated others by using work from people on the margins, and helped mobilize protest.

SLIDE 17: Today we're going to connect these points to current conditions here in Charlottesville. What was done with #BlackLivesMatter is replicable. We've seen it in various forms with protests like #OscarsSoWhite and #MeToo.

#Charlottesville became a hashtag over the summer, and not for particularly good reason. On Thursday, we've apply what we know to develop our own agency in creating a social-media campaign that draws amplifies voices from this area, and educates people about what's really happening in #Charlottesville.

SLIDE 18: With your group, you're going to try and come up with a hashtag that could be used to promote an alternative narrative about UVA and Charlottesville. Listen carefully, because some of the steps require you to work together, others require that you work silently.

SLIDE 19: We'll start by working silently. I want each person to come up with five hashtags that they could see being used as part of a campaign to create a counternarrative about the events of Aug. 11 and 12.

Timer for three minutes.

SLIDE 20: Now, in your podcast groups, I'm going to give you five minutes to talk about your hashtags, and **SLIDE 21:** decide on ONE that you'd like to share with the class.

SLIDE 22: Before that timer runs out, please bring your selected hashtag to the front and place it on the board.

Timer for five minutes.

SLIDE 23: Now, each person has three votes. Vote for your favorite hashtags by placing a small dot on that Post-It.

I'll give you five minutes to get this done.

SLIDE 24: Talk about it.