

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

- 1 Throughout the text, I oscillate between *Black* and *African American* to refer to Black American culture. I am aware that diasporic African cultures in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America share some of the same beliefs and practices discussed here. Moreover, many African and indigenous ethnicities also have contributed values, language patterns, and aesthetics to what I am arguing here for as *Blackness*.
- 2 No shade to Deray Mckesson.

### CHAPTER 1. DISTRIBUTING BLACKNESS

- 1 One of my greatest regrets is that Byron Burkhalter never revisited his 1997 research on [soc.comm.african.american](http://soc.comm.african.american) (moderated).
- 2 On September 3, 2014, the University of Southern California mistakenly announced that two white men would be leading a study of Black Twitter by reducing “Black Twitter” to “Black Twitter users who watch *Scandal*.” USC’s first mistake was not properly crediting the doctoral research to Dayna Chatman, the Black woman originator of the project. Their second mistake was the reduction of Black media practitioners and audiences to a homogeneous sample.
- 3 Is this a bug or a feature?

### CHAPTER 2. INFORMATION INSPIRATIONS

- 1 I am aware that the internet and the World Wide Web are *not* the same. Nevertheless, this chapter uses the terms interchangeably.
- 2 Enactment is still a relatively unexplored concept to explore for race and new media, as few Western information/media platforms or applications are designed for users outside of whiteness.
- 3 See [www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org).
- 4 Arnold Brown II, Frank Washington, and H. Edward Young Jr. See the website at [www.laptopmag.com/articles/blackbird-the-browser-for-black-people](http://www.laptopmag.com/articles/blackbird-the-browser-for-black-people).
- 5 98/Me/2000/XP/Vista.
- 6 The extension allowed, among other things, the customization of a page’s appearance, including stripping unwanted elements or reorganizing available information.

- 7 For more on algorithmic discrimination in Google search results, please see Noble's (2017) groundbreaking work.
- 8 Digg was, at the time of the original research, a social information/news aggregator that allowed users to vote on content. It was purchased by Betaworks in 2010 and is now a curated news aggregator.
- 9 A bloglist is literally a list of blogs that is formatted to fit onto the side of a blog page. It is used to demonstrate affiliation with other like-minded bloggers or blogs of interest.
- 10 I have not updated the search for this chapter, as Blackbird has received negligible attention, use, and market share since its introduction.
- 11 Ars Technica was purchased by Condé Nast in 2008, several months before its coverage of Blackbird. It is part of Condé Nast Digital, along with *Wired* magazine, but is easily more enthusiast-focused than its sister technology journalism publication and website.
- 12 Wauters isn't Black. He also felt similarly about the Gloss browser, which was intended to target women.
- 13 The article's comments are no longer available online.
- 14 Obviously, this comment was made long before the success of Marvel's 2016 *Black Panther* movie.
- 15 This last sentence was apparently intended to defuse his comments by referencing a tag line from old comedic routines.

### CHAPTER 3. "THE BLACK PURPOSES OF SPACE TRAVEL"

- 1 See Parry (2014).
- 2 See Florini (2019).
- 3 This is a reference to the pejorative news coverage of Sandra Bland's murder at the hands of police.
- 4 From <http://twitter.com/anildash/status/969974366>, @anildash.
- 5 From <http://twitter.com/loresjoberg/status/970017179>, @loresjoberg.
- 6 From <http://twitter.com/gesteves/status/970011697>, @gesteves18.
- 7 This article was written so recently after the introduction of the hashtag and trending topic that Wilson didn't use the now common convention of beginning a hashtag with the octothorp.
- 8 In 2009, Twitter's home page featured tweets in real time that were accessible without a login. Try that now.
- 9 Not the Nick in the tweet above.
- 10 This critique does not apply to the Ramsey article, however.
- 11 Hirsch also notes that another service, TAS (RNC 2004 Text Alert Service), developed by Nathan Freitas and UPOC, also offered Twitter-like functionality at around the same time TXTmob was deployed in 2004.
- 12 Users receiving tweets through this convention get a truncated portion of the message and a link to open the corresponding Twitter web page.

- 13 This description of Twitter's web/desktop interface is circa 2016. Twitter issued a much-derided major redesign of the web/desktop interface (there's no desktop application) in July 2019, featuring three columns and an extensive remapping of interface elements.
- 14 As of 2016.
- 15 I believe that this finding points toward an understanding of how race organizes whiteness and Twitter as well.
- 16 Following the fiery destruction of her apartment complex, Kimberly "Sweet" Brown uttered this iconic phrase while describing her escape from the fire.

#### CHAPTER 4. BLACK ONLINE DISCOURSE, PART ONE

- 1 I am intentionally using *frame* rather than *topoi* to suggest that these three categories are ideas that take meaning and coherence from their organization, salience, and context (Entman, 1993; Kuypers, 2010) located in the text, the communicator, the receiver, and the culture at large rather than solely in one or the other. Thus while the three concepts have powerful symbolic and thematic meaning outside of digital practice, the organizational and discursive capacity of digital practice works to frame them as powerful interpretive cues for Black online expression.
- 2 Black people can be prejudiced or biased, but those are individual behaviors that are unsupported by the institutional and structural behaviors of white supremacist ideology.
- 3 "That ho over there" is a recent gendered, misogynistic addition to ratchet's meaning. It denigrates women who are considered to be promiscuous. The reference includes an expert digital practice component: thots are accused of frequent posting of sexual or pornographic social media content for attention, along with overuse of Instagram or Snapchat visual and audio filters.
- 4 In addition to its status as one of the first social media networks, BlackPlanet (BP) is notable for including HTML creation tools for the users. These tools sparked a robust economy for budding graphic and web design aficionados, as BP users quickly learned to appreciate web design as a mode of Black digital expression.
- 5 Pew Internet defines a smartphone owner as anyone who answers yes to one or both of the following questions: "Is your phone a smartphone?" and "Does your phone operate on a smartphone platform?"
- 6 At the time I wrote this in 2016, smartphone screens were still averaging less than 5.0 inches (ScientiaMobile, 2018). Average screen sizes in 2019 have grown to incorporate higher-resolution displays, and now nearly 40 percent of smartphones sold in the United States have screen sizes greater than 5.5 inches (Zeb, 2018).
- 7 The belief about isolation can be directly traced to the smartphone's supplanting of the iPod and other MP3 players, whose primary music output was the 3.5-mm headphone jack.

- 8 “Government name” is AAVE for the name on your birth certificate or other government document.
- 9 Given my discussion of hyperlinks earlier, it’s worth noting that the nickname not only is a personal reference but is often a clickable hyperlink leading to the user’s account details or content (*pace* Netflix).
- 10 In Twitter’s extensive 2019 beta testing of its mobile client, the service deprecated display names by not showing them in replies to a tweet, leaving only a machine-generated username for the reader to guess at the identity of the respondent. This practice short-circuits Black Twitter creativity for little gain, in my opinion.
- 11 When using Twitter as SMS, the 140 character limit still applies.
- 12 Twitter recently made significant changes to tweet content: tweets can now be up to 280 characters, and usernames no longer count as characters in a reply (they still count as characters in an original tweet).
- 13 Yes, you must say both names.
- 14 *Fuckboi* is a viscerally insulting term describing a man who is somehow lacking in traditional masculinity or who is “lame, who sucks, and ain’t shit” (Brown, 2015).
- 15 I experienced something similar while giving presentations on media examples of Blackness following the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Informed, educated audiences would reduce or ignore my arguments for Black online authors’ re- and deconstructions of Black identity to instead express their liberal (or conservative) views about the appropriateness of the actions being depicted.
- 16 Hate-watching is the activity of viewing media that one actively dislikes; many practitioners voice their hatred through Twitter or other social media.
- 17 Noble (2016) points out that algorithmic researchers admit it isn’t always clear how machine-learning algorithms make connections between data points.
- 18 For example, Twitter has a much-derided feature displaying content “liked” (not necessarily retweeted) by one or more people that one follows.
- 19 This is not to say that non-Black Twitter didn’t respond to the gaffe, but their responses are much tamer. They certainly didn’t repost the hashtag, for example.

## CHAPTER 5. BLACK ONLINE DISCOURSE, PART TWO

- 1 Good as in “avoiding approbation” rather than as a positive change agent.
- 2 Another way to understand Black cult figures (Warner, forthcoming) is the phenomenon of the “chitlin’ circuit,” where Black entertainers uninterested in “crossing over”—or unable to—still commanded die-hard fans and financial success by touring Black venues.
- 3 His concerns might have paid off; one child is a recently graduated engineer, while the other has a full scholarship to an HBCU.
- 4 This is how telephone companies began to describe telephone service as fax lines and DSL services were installed in businesses and residences.
- 5 I share this excerpt for a rather amusing reason: I presented this work to a group of mathematicians, engineers, computer scientists, and physicists during a

fellowship at Microsoft Research New England's Social Media Collective. As one might expect, the audience was 99 percent non-Black; *nobody* knew who Ayesha Curry was or why they should care. While you, dear reader, may be in the know, it is not always safe to assume that my entire audience of two will be.

- 6 According to Oprah, this is also a rule of Twitter: never invoke Black Twitter by name (see also Bloody Mary, Candyman, and Beetlejuice).
- 7 EUR stands for *Entertainment Urban Weekly*.
- 8 BlackVoices got its start as an AOL community portal and was particularly popular as a chat destination for many Black urban dwellers in the late 1990s.
- 9 In case you did forget, MSBET was a joint venture between Microsoft and BET, promoted as an online space for Black culture, entertainment, information seeking, and job hunting.
- 10 I was unable to retrieve my originally archived versions of these web pages from 2015, which included comments made by The Root's commenting audience. Those comments did not survive the transition to Kinja—the new publishing platform—and thus are not discussed in this analysis.
- 11 Many lower than mine!
- 12 Gold-Onwude may indeed be a Black Twitter participant but here is posting to Twitter in her capacity as a news reporter.
- 13 One Urban Dictionary definition uses Jesus as an MCM example: "My man crush Monday is Jesus Christ, I'll go gay for Jesus."
- 14 See Young (2016): "Another subsection of Black Twitter . . . a less progressive, nuance-averse demographic comprising faux-Afrocentrics and misogynists (male and female)."

## CHAPTER 6. MAKING A WAY OUT OF NO WAY

- 1 Twitter, as always, provides a wealth of alternative examples.
- 2 Tricking off: spending money or resources without accruing any gain. In this case, I am name-checking these theories but not actually ingesting or incorporating them.
- 3 Instagram, where Black users overindex compared to their demographic census representation.
- 4 See the definition from *Merriam-Webster*: "the degree of attractiveness an individual, activity, or thing possesses as a behavioral goal."
- 5 Don't @ me.

