AAS 371: Black Digital Studies

About the Instructor

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Virtual Office hours: 11:30-12:30PM Tuesday and By Appointment

Course Description

Historically, the study of the digital has been an amorphous undertaking, spanning multiple fields and disciplines and positioning the digital as a democratic space full of possibility and wonder. The digital was imagined as a space of anonymity and freedom from the hierarchies and structures of oppression which plagued the offline world. However, as society moves farther into the techno-cultural future, we have seen that the digital has not created a brave new world separate from societal ills, but instead has replicated the offline world that we live in within the digital sphere. By utilizing Black feminist and queer frameworks, this course will help you understand and articulate the intersections and interstices of being Black and Digital.

As a burgeoning body of research which focuses on Black life and culture as it is experienced and engaged via a variety of tools, platforms, and new and emerging media spheres, Black Digital Studies spans a variety of disciplinary backgrounds from the humanities to social sciences. This scholarship critically investigates the ethical, legal, and sociopolitical role that digital media and technology plays in our

understanding of Black community and culture. Informed by the tenants of African and African American Studies, Black Digital Studies is a field and a framework built on ethics, justice, and community engagement. Pushing back against Digital Divide rhetoric which produces deficit narratives of Black knowledge and engagement with science and technology, this work centers the research and contributions of Black diasporic people in the study of culture and technology.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of Black Digital Studies as a field of study - Participate in Weekly Discussions & Interactive Workshops

2. Students will assess and critique media texts, technological tools, and/or platforms. - Technocultural Analysis Paper (Due December 9th)

3. Students will research and design a project utilizing a Black Digital praxis and critical frameworks. - Collaborative Digital Praxis Project (Keywords Assignments)

Teaching Philosophy

As an Instructor, I believe that encouraging students to draw on, while expanding, their own knowledge is one of the best ways to teach. Especially in the digital era, it is easy to interpret our media saturated society as having little to do with how we think, act, and interpret the world. However, by providing students with multiple texts that reflect current as well as historical moments in the media, I will guide you in developing more than a superficial knowledge of media and technology. I also believe in an active learning space, and I have constructed this Brightspace portal and the course itself for engagement and active learning. One of the methods that I use to encourage active learning is through facilitated group discussion as well as providing you with material that exemplify course terms in interesting ways. By focusing on current events and popular culture, I want you to get used to not only thinking critically within the classroom, but how you can apply that knowledge outside of the classroom. With each new topic I hope that you draw more and more connections between the course material, your prior knowledge and other courses, as well as new insights about how media, science, and technology, interact with and influence cultural values and societal norms.

Assignments and Points

Your learning will be assessed through a combination of weekly workshops and group discussions, a collaborative digital praxis project, a final paper. Details on these

assignments, including rubrics to guide evaluation, and guidelines on discussion participation and evaluation can be found in the syllabus and on the course website.

Assignments	Due	Percentage
Participation	Throughout the semester	10%
Weekly Discussion Posts & Responses	10 Weekly Posts	20%
Keywords in Black Digital Studies (Choose 4)	Due 9/16; 10/7; 11/4; 12/2	20%
Technocultural Analysis Workshop	October 14	10%
Speculative Futures Workshop	November 18	10%
Technocultural Analysis Paper	December 9	30%

Weekly Student Led Discussions

On Fridays we will have an asynchronous online discussion on the reading(s) for the week and the lecture. Each week there are specific questions to begin the discussion and initial discussion posts are due on Wednesday at 11:59PM to the Brightspace. On Wednesday, you will upload your initial post to the Discussion Post Assignment and then post a copy of your initial post to the Discussion Board. On Fridays, you should also log in to the Brightspace Discussion Board to read and respond to at least TWO discussion posts from your classmates. The instructor will serve as the moderator for these discussions, by asking questions and replying to the conversations that you have started. Please consult the syllabus and the Brightspace site for more information on Discussion Guidelines and Grading Rubrics.

Collaborative Digital Praxis Project - Keywords

During this term, our collaborative digital praxis project will be to create the content for a Wikipedia Page or digital presence on the burgeoning field of Black Digital Studies and the many subfields within it. Utilizing a Keywords in Black Digital Studies approach, this Digital Praxis Project will demonstrate the power of collaborative research and collective organizing. When engaging in writing and sharing educational content online we become active producers of knowledge, and not just passive consumers. Therefore, each student will write about specific keywords over the course of the term. These keywords will begin as short entries before becoming a part of a larger project or Wikipedia page.

- Keywords are a 250-500 word entry on your selection that gives a brief overview of the term, why it is relevant to Black Digital Studies, where or from whom the term originated, and any relevant examples.
- On non-lecture days you will use your time outside of lecture to work through the terms for the week and write keyword entries. Then we will come together at the end of the semester to combine our definitions and create a comprehensive understanding of Black Digital Studies.
  - https://wikiedu.org/blog/2019/03/06/the-wikipedia-assignment-praxis-as-pedagogy/
- You will write 1 keyword entry for each section of the course (there are 4 sections so by the end of the term you will have 4 Keywords). Each Keyword Entry will be graded on the criteria and rubric found on the Brightspace, and the individual assignments together will be 20% of your final grade.

Technocultural Analysis Paper (Due December 9th)

Throughout this course we will discuss multiple forms of digital media, platforms, tools, and technologies. As we think through the sociopolitical role that identity plays in the creation and consumption of these tools, the framework of Critical Technoculture Discourse Analysis (CTDA) will serve as the guidelines for selecting and analyzing a technology or platform to write about through the lens of critical theory and Black digital praxis. Conceptualized by Andre Brock in response to digital divide discourse around the technology use of underrepresented groups, CTDA offers a concise set of instructions for you to uncover that "artifacts have politics" and that how and why we use technology is never neutral. The Technocultural Analysis Paper should be between 8-10 double spaced pages and is worth 30% of your grade. Prior to turning in this paper you will complete a workshop to brainstorm ideas on October 14th. Completion of the workshop assignment will be worth 10% of your final grade and more details on these assignments can be found on the Brightspace Site.

AAS 371: Course Schedule

History and Theory of Black Digital Studies	
Week 1	**By Another Name: Defining Black Digital Studies**
8/24 & 8/26	**Lecture:** Welcome & Introduction to Black Digital Studies
	Keywords: e-Black Studies
8/28	**Discussion:** Introduction to Collaborative Digital Praxis Project
Readings for W1	● Alkalimat, Abdul. "eBlack studies: A twenty-first-century challenge." Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture 2.3 (2000): 69-76. ● Johnson, Jessica Marie, and Mark Anthony Neal. "Introduction: Wild Seed in the Machine." (2017): 1-2.
Week 2	**How it feels to Be Black Digital Me: On The Technology of Race**
8/31 & 9/2	**Lecture**: Defining Race After the Internet & Before Technology
	Keywords: Critical Race STS
9/4	**Discussion:** How do you define Black Digital Studies? ● What does it mean to be Black in the Digital Age? ● What is the digital legacy of slavery?
Readings for Week 2	● Coleman, Beth. "Race as technology." Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies 24.1 (70) (2009): 177-207. ● Benjamin, Ruha. "Catching Our Breath: Critical Race STS and the Carceral Imagination." Engaging Science, Technology, and Society 2 (2016): 145-156.
Week 3	**Always (AI)Ready: Que-erying Digital Blackness**
9/7 & 9/9	**Lecture:** Black Data and Black Queer Operating Systems
	Keywords: Queer OS and Black Data
9/11	**Discussion:** What is queer about Black Digital technology and culture?
Readings for Week 3	● McGlotten, Shaka. "Black data." *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies.* (2016): 262-86. ● Keeling, Kara. "Queer OS." Cinema Journal 53.2 (2014): 152-157.

Frameworks for Black Digital Studies	
Week 4	**I Always Feel Like Somebody's Watching Me: Surveillance and the Predictive Police State**
9/14	**Lecture:** Panopticons and the Politics of Predicting
9/16	**Keywords in Black Digital Studies Assignment #1 Due**
9/18	**Discussion**: What is the digital panopticon for Black people? ● How do histories and realities of surveillance map differently on and around Black bodies?
Readings for Week 4	● Browne, Simone. "Race and surveillance." Handbook on Surveillance Studies. New York: Routledge (2012): 72-79.
Week 5	**In the Matrix Like Morpheus: Algorithms and Black Code Studies**
9/21 & 9/23	**Lecture**: Breaking Black Codes and Black Boxes
	Keywords: Black Code Studies
9/25	**Discussion:** How do we unpack the digital "Black Box" of algorithms? ● Why are algorithms important to the study of Black life and culture?
Readings for Week 5	● Amaro, Ramon. 2019. As If. e-flux architecture: Becoming Digital, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248073/as-if/ ● Noble, Safiya Umoja. "Missed connections: What search engines say about women." *Bitch Magazine 54* (2012): 36-41.
Week 6	**Intersectionality Online: Cyberfeminism Across Disciplines**
9/28 & 9/30	**Lecture:** Race and Gender in Cyberspace
	Keywords: Black Cyberfeminism
10/2	**Discussion:** How do people perform identity in online space? ● Is the internet disconnected from offline reality i.e. disembodied? ● What are the unique challenges that women of various backgrounds face online and within social media platforms?
Readings for Week 6	● McMillan Cottom, Tressie. "Black cyberfeminism: Intersectionality, institutions and digital sociology." (2016). ● Daniels, Jessie. "Rethinking cyberfeminism (s): Race, gender, and embodiment." Women's Studies Quarterly 37.1/2 (2009): 101-124. ● Everett, Anna. "On cyberfeminism and cyberwomanism: High-tech mediations of feminism's discontents." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 30.1 (2004): 1278-1286.

	● Richard, Gabriela T., and Kishonna L. Gray. "Gendered play, racialized reality: Black cyberfeminism, inclusive communities of practice, and the intersections of learning, socialization, and resilience in online gaming." Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 39.1 (2018): 112-148.
Media & Methods of Technocultural Analysis	
Week 7	**Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis**
10/5	**Lecture:** Critical Discourse Analysis of Culture, Data, and Technology
10/7	**Keywords in Black Digital Studies Assignment #2 Due**
10/9	**Discussion:** What is the relationship between artifacts, practices, and beliefs? ● In what ways do technologies re-create or reinforce ideology and oppression? ● In what ways does technology make space for joy and pleasure?
Readings for Week 7	● Brock, André. "Critical technocultural discourse analysis." New Media & Society 20.3 (2018): 1012-1030. ● Steele, Catherine Knight. "Black bloggers and their varied publics: The everyday politics of black discourse online." Television & New Media 19.2 (2018): 112-127.
Week 8	**Playing the Dozens: #BlackTwitter and the Politics of Platforms**
10/12 & 10/14	**Lecture:** The Uses and Gratifications of Black Twitter
	Workshop: Technocultural Discourse Analysis Paper
10/16	**Discussion for Workshop:** How are platforms figured as spaces of Black cultural expression? ● What role do corporations and platforms play in supporting/stifling Black content?
Readings for Week 8	● Florini, Sarah. "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin' Communication and Cultural Performance on "Black Twitter"." Television & New Media 15.3 (2014): 223-237. ● Williams, Apryl, and Vanessa Gonlin. "I got all my sisters with me (on Black Twitter): second screening of How to Get Away with Murder as a discourse on Black Womanhood." Information, Communication & Society 20.7 (2017): 984-1004.
Week 9	**A Space of Our Own: Indie Film, YouTube, and Web Series**
10/19 & 10/21	**Lecture:** Platforming Intersectionality in Film, Television, & Digital Media
	Keywords: Quare Shared Recognition & Black Vernacular Technological Creativity
10/23	**Discussion:** How does the internet serve as a space for producing and consuming narratives which exist outside of mainstream understandings of Black identity?

	● How has digital media and technology changed the production of Black film and television?
Readings for Week 9	● Day, Faithe, and Aymar Jean Christian. "Locating black queer TV: Fans, producers, and networked publics on YouTube." Transformative Works and Cultures 24 (2017). ● Fouche, Rayvon. "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud: African Americans, American artifactual culture, and black vernacular technological creativity." American Quarterly 58.3 (2006): 639-661.
Week 10	**Jukin' and Jivin': Race and Identity in Video-Games**
10/26 & 10/28	**Lecture:** Representation & Realism in VR & Video Games
	Initial Discussion Post: Race and Representation in Gaming
10/30	**Discussion Questions:** What role does race and identity play in the representation and reality of video game culture/consumption/community in the 21st century?
Readings for Week 10	● Russworm, TreaAndrea M., and Samantha Blackmon. "Replaying Video Game History as a Mixtape of Black Feminist Thought." Feminist Media Histories 6.1 (2020): 93-118. ● Gray, Kishonna L. "Intersecting oppressions and online communities: Examining the experiences of women of color in Xbox Live." Information, Communication & Society 15.3 (2012): 411-428.
BLACK DIGITAL PRAXIS	
Week 11	**Black to the Future: Black Digital Humanities and Building Digital Archives**
11/2 & 11/4	**Lecture:** Taking Black DH from Theory to Practice
	Keywords in Black Digital Studies Assignment #3 Due
11/6	**Discussion**: What does Black Digital Humanities look like in practice i.e. what are the fields projects and methodologies? ● What does it mean to create/curate/collect Black Digital History? ● How do we preserve and present Black history using digital tools?
Readings for Week 11	● Johnson, Jessica Marie. "Markup BodiesBlack [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads." Social Text 36.4 (137) (2018): 57-79. ● Bailey, Moya Z. "All the digital humanists are white, all the nerds are men, but some of us are brave." Journal of Digital Humanities 1.1 (2011): 9-12. ● Noble, Safiya. "Towards a Critical Black Digital Humanities." https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-f2acf72c-a469-49d8-be35-67f9ac1e3a60/section/5aafe7fe-db7e-4ec1-935f-09d8028a2687
Week 12	**Fight the Power: Data and Software for Black Lives**

11/9 & 11/11	**Lecture:** Taking Black DH from Practice to the Political
	Keywords: Black Digital Humanities and Hashtag Activism (#transformDH)
11/13	**Discussion**: How are scholars and practitioners creating software, platforms, and technology for Black lives? ● What are the ways that data and technology are being mobilized within social justice movements?
Readings for W12	● Williams, Sherri. "#SayHerName: using digital activism to document violence against black women." Feminist media studies 16.5 (2016): 922-925. ● Freelon, Deen, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith Clark. "Beyond the hashtags:# Ferguson,# Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice." Center for Media & Social Impact, American University, Forthcoming (2016).
Week 13	**#TeamAndroid or Nah: AfroFuturism and the Dystopian Post-Present**
11/16	**Lecture:** AfroPessimism, Optimism, and all the Black Thoughts in Between
11/18	**Workshop:** Crafting our Collective Speculative Future
11/20	**Discussion for Workshop:** Is there hope for a Black Digital Future? ● Are we already living our Black digital future? In what ways?
Readings for W13	● Bailey, Moya. "Shaping God": The Power of Octavia Butler's Black Feminist and Womanist SciFi Visions in the Shaping of a New World — An Interview with Adrienne Maree Brown https://adanewmedia.org/2013/11/issue3-baileybrown/ ● Nelson, Alondra. "Afrofuturism: Past-Future Visions." Color Lines 3.1 (2000): 34-47.
	Week 14: Final In-Class Meeting
11/23	**Lecture, Discussion, and Review**
12/2	**Final Keywords in Black Digital Studies Assignment #4 Due**
12/9	**SUBMIT FINAL ASSIGNMENT:** **TECHNOCULTURAL ANALYSIS PAPER**

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