

Blackness 2.0: Race and New Technologies (AFR 202/AMST 202)

Professor Kimberly Springer

Spring 2010

MW 11:00 AM-12:15 PM

Course Description

Media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman poses a number of important questions about new technologies: what will the new technology do, what will it undo? Who will be the winners and who will be the losers in any new technology? This course seeks to determine what people of color win and lose vis-a-vis new technologies. How can we conceptualize the role of race in, ostensibly, a utopian race-less environment? Is there more to new media and race than assumptions about a "digital divide"? Course materials include secondary literature and qualitative research to explore how the racial discourse of the "real world" is (or isn't) reshaped and redefined in the virtual world.

Topics for discussion include: defining the "new" in new technologies; reproduction and reproductive capacities; queer science/transscience; the politics of blogosphere; social networking and power; digital art; love Internet-style; designers, artists, and viewers; fandom; e-commerce and capitalism; gamers and the virtual world; and activism on the web.

Required Materials

(a) denotes e-reserve articles

(b) denotes a book for purchase. There are three (3) number of books assigned for the course available online or from Water Street Books.

1. Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore, Missing Bodies: the politics of visibility (New York University Press, 2009).
2. Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992).
3. Lisa Nakamura, Digitizing Race: visual cultures on the internet (U. Minnesota Press, 2008).

(w) denotes a website to view before class

Supplementary bibliography

A host of readings in cyberculture studies are reviewed at: <http://rccs.usfca.edu/booklist.asp>.

Assessments

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Response essay on biopolitics: 15%

Gaming project: 35%

Final essay: 40%

Response Essay (2000 words)

due: Wednesday, 10 March 2010

This essay should respond to an issue, theory, or concept presented in the "biopolitics" section of the course. How have you come to understand biopolitics in US and/or global culture? How would you define the term "biopolitics"? Who sets the terms of debate? Who are the subjects and objects of this particular discourse?

Gaming Assignment & Multimedia Project

Due Wednesday, 12 May 2010

Since the class is relatively small, as part of the gaming assignment, we will produce a web-based project on our experiences in the virtual and video gaming worlds. You'll be asked to explore relevant theories and concepts around race, gender, sexuality, class, or physical ability as they intersect with biopolitics or new media.

In advance of our first planning session, consider what skills you will bring to the project or what skills you would like to develop. The main skills needed are project management, web design, illustration/art, writing, and research.

We will have sessions with the Williams OIT Department to learn the basics around using the software package, Comic Life, and using audio and video. The class will be assigned a Media Mentor who will instruct us in software design and be available for assistance outside class time. Sessions with the Media Mentor will be held in the Media Education Center (room TBA).

Final essay (4000-words; 45%):

Your final essay will be a theoretical reflection on themes of the course and on the group project. Ideally, at least one theoretical concept will capture your imagination, which you will apply to analyzing issues of identity as they highlight dilemmas, solutions, innovation, problems, and/or next steps in how the world is imagined through new technologies. Please feel free to discuss potential topics with me over the course of the semester.

Lecture & Seminar Schedule

Week 1 (5 February): organizational meeting

Wednesday

Syllabus review and class policies

Week 2 (w/b 8 Feb): race and new technologies

Monday: What's so "new" about new technologies?

(a) B. Joy, "Why the future doesn't need us," in American Association for the Advancement of Science: *Science and Technology Policy Yearbook 2002*, eds. Albert H. Teich. [27 pages]

(a) K. Cerulo, "Identity construction: new issues, new directions," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23 (1997): 385-409.

Wednesday

(b) T. Morrison, Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992). [91 pages]

(w) D. Pilgrim, "Notes on Racist Jokes," <http://www.ferris.edu/JIMCROW/essays/jokes/>

(w) <http://www.rent-a-negro.com/>

(w) <http://www.blackpeopleloveus.com/>

(w) <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/full-list-of-stuff-white-people-like/>

Part one: biopolitics

Week 3 (w/b 15 Feb): power and tech

Monday

M. Casper and L. Moore, Missing Bodies, Introduction – chapter 4 ("Biodisaster")

Wednesday

M. Casper and L. Moore, Missing Bodies, chapters 5-8.

Week 4 (w/b 22 Feb): “de-racialization” as globalization?

Monday

(a) O. Obasogie, *Playing the Gene Card: a report on race and human biotechnology* (Oakland, CA: Center for Genetics and Society, 2009): 1-48.¹ [48 pages]

Wednesday

(a) Ziba Kashef, “Genetic drift,” *Colorlines* (Sept / Oct 2007). [5 pages]

(a) E. Kaw “Medicalization of racial features: Asian American women and cosmetic surgery,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7:1 (1993): 74-89. [15 pages]

(a) D. Roberts. “Is race-based medicine good for us?: African American approaches to race, biomedicine, and equality.” *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 36:3 (2008): 537–545. [7 pages]

Week 5 (w/b 1 March): queer science/transscience

Monday

(a) Center for Genetics and Society, “Genetic technologies and the LGBTQI community: Myths and Facts.” [2 pages]

(a) M. Darnovsky, “Homo Genesis,” *Bitch*, 6 June 2008. [3 pages]

(a) J. Butler, “Transgender Butch: butch/FTM border wars and the masculine continuum,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 4 (1998): 287-310. [20 pages]

Wednesday

**Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center:
Comic Life**

Week 6 (w/b 8 Mar): reproduction and reproductive capacities

Monday

(a) D. Roberts, “Privatization and punishment in the new age of reprognetics. *Emory Law Journal* 54:3 (2005): 1343-60. [18 pages]

(a) Arlie Hochschild, “Childbirth at the global crossroads,” *The American Prospect*, 21 September 2009. [4 pages]

(a) F. Kissling, “Can we ever say a woman can’t choose?,” *Salon*, 21 June 2009. [4 pages]

(a) S. Nolen, “India: Land of the Rising Son,” *The Globe and Mail*, 11 September 2009. [5 pages]

(a) B. McKibben, “Designer Genes,” *Orion*, April 30th, 2003. [6 pages]

(a) A. Zeisler and E. Galpern, “Conceiving the future: reproductive justice activists on technology and policy,” *Bitch*, Summer 2008. [4 pages]

Wednesday

**Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center:
Audio and Video**

Response essay 1 due via Blackboard by 5pm or in class

¹ For endnotes, please see <http://www.thegenecard.org>.

Part two: new media

Week 7 (w/b 15 Mar): issues in new media studies

Monday

(a) L. Gitelman, "Media as Historical Subjects," in Always Already New Media, History, and the Data of Culture (The MIT Press, 2008). [22 pages]

(b) L. Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*, Introduction – chapter 3 ("Social Optics...")

Wednesday

(b) L. Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*, chapters 4 - epilogue

Spring Recess 20 March-4 April

Week 8 (w/b 5 April):

Monday

Bring along field notes to discuss initial experiences with gaming in relationship to previous texts (especially Nakamura)

Wednesday:

activism on the web

(a) L. Stein, "Social movement web use in theory and practice," *New Media & Society*, 11:4 (2009): 749-71. [20 pages]

(a) C. Beckles, "Black Liberation and the Internet: a strategic analysis," *Journal of Black Studies*, 31: 3 (2001): 311-324. [13 pages]

Week 9 (w/b 12 April): social networking and power: the politics of blogosphere

Monday

(a) M. Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: the Internet and the Public Sphere," 1995. [11 pages]

(a) L. Kvasny et. al., "Social Activism in the 'Blackosphere': The Jena 6 Case," in J. Park and E. Abels (eds.), Interpersonal Relations and Social Patterns in Communication Technologies (IGI Global, forthcoming 2010). [13 pages]

Wednesday: gamers and the virtual world

(a) D. Leonard, "'Live in Your World, Play in Ours': Race, Video Games, and Consuming the Other." *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education*, 3:4 (2003): 1-8. [8 pages]

(a) A. Everett et. al., "The Power of Play: The Portrayal and Performance of Race in Video Games," in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*. ed. Katie Salen (The MIT Press, 2008):141–166. [20 pages]

Wednesday

(g) Discussion of video and virtual gaming experience and race

Week 10 (w/b 19 April)

Monday: love, internet-style

(a) S. Wilson et al. "Dating Across Race: An Examination of African American Internet Personal Advertisements," *Journal of Black Studies* 37 (2007): 964-982.

(w) Ok Cupid blog, "Your Race Affects Whether People Write You Back," <http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/2009/10/05/your-race-affects-whether-people-write-you-back/>

Read report and choose a selection of comments; newest comments are listed first

Wednesday: sexuality on the Internet

(a) C. Sharpe, "Racialized Fantasies on the Internet," *Signs* 24:4 (1999): 1089-1096. [7 pages]

(a) K. Nemoto, "Intimacy, Desire and the Construction of Self in Relationships between Asian American Women and White American Men," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9:1 (2006): 27-54. [25 pages]

(w) <http://bigbadchinesemama.com>

(a) C. Hudson, "Big Bad Chinese Mama: Asian cyber-feminism and subversive textual strategies" *Gender* 46 (2007). http://www.genders.org/g46/g46_hudson.html. [20 pages]

Week 11 (w/b 26 April):

Monday (my office, 336 NAB)

Gaming project and essay consults

Please feel free to bring potential topics, research questions, tentative theses for the essay.

Wednesday

***Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center:
Bring along field notes, outline of project, and queries for troubleshooting***

Week 12 (w/b 3 May): fandom

Monday

(a) J. Gray, et. al., "Why Study Fans?," in *Fandom: identities and communities in a mediated world*, eds. J. Gray et. al. (New York University Press, 2007).

(a) J. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience*, eds. Lisa Lewis (Routledge, 1992).

(a) Jessica Pressler, "Truly Indie Fans," *The New York Times*, 28 January 2007. <http://tiny.cc/J8MyQ>

Wednesday (These readings are posted to Blackboard)

(a) R. Eglash, "Race, Sex, and Nerds: From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters," *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2002.

(a) A. Everett, "The Revolution Will be Digitized: Afrocentricity and the Digital Public Sphere," *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2002

Gaming Assignment & Multimedia Project

Important dates:

Wednesday, 3 March: Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center: Comic Life

Wednesday, 10 March: Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center: Audio and Video

Wednesday, 5 April: Bring along field notes to discuss initial experiences with gaming in relationship to previous texts (especially Nakamura)

Wednesday, 28 April: Group session with Media Mentor in Media Education Center: bring along field notes, outline of project, and queries for troubleshooting

Wednesday, 12 May: Presentation of projects

This assignment requires a minimum of three hours of video or virtual game play. The first hour, for example, might be used to simply get used to using controllers, figuring out the game space, and learning the game's rules.

You can play any commercially available game. Choices include, but are not limited to:

Second Life (<http://secondlife.com/>)

World of Warcraft (www.worldofwarcraft.com)

Call of Duty

Grand Theft Auto III or IV

Imagine's Fashion Party, Fashion Designer, Happy Cooking, Babies (wii.Nintendo DS)

Age of Empires 3

Guitar Hero 3, Band Hero, or DJ Hero

The Sims 2 or 3

American Idol

Any platform or console will do: Internet-based; XBOX 360; PSP; Playstation 3; Nintendo DS; iPhone, etc. If you don't have a gaming console, I'm sure a well-placed request to a friend (or friend of a friend) for some game time will be fruitful.

If you're unfamiliar with gaming, it might also be useful for research purposes to play with a seasoned gamer and have a discussion about how race and other identities are enacted in the game world.

Post-game play, you should keep field notes about the experience and how race and other intersecting identities are constructed within the world of the game. The game's official sites and gaming blogs are also useful resources for information. Some questions to consider:

- who is the game's audience? how do you fit (or not) with that demographic?
- were you asked to choose a character or assigned a character? what's the character's race or ethnicity? gender? class? sexual orientation? how are these varying identities made evident or signified?
- does the game world in some way attempt to subvert identity categories? if so, how?
- who are the other characters in the game world? are they also "raced"? do interactions have any seeming reactions/interactions related to characters' identities?
- what historical and sociopolitical resonances are there between the game and the real world?

A world about online video games

As with any interactive medium, it's important to be mindful of one's own safety. Plainly put, there are freaks out there, so please use common sense when sharing (or not sharing) personal information.