

## [Toward a History of Black Digital Intellectuals](#)

by Howard Ramsby II | [www.siueblackstudies.com](http://www.siueblackstudies.com)

If I wasn't so behind on my literary history projects *and* my grading of student papers, I would be inclined to take up the task of writing a history of black digital or online intellectuals. And maybe, the term "intellectuals" doesn't fully capture what I have in mind. Really, it would be more about folks who were collaborating on technology projects and participating in various online conversations.

Whatever the case, I received a renewed spark to my interest in these African American (digital) histories at the Black Thought 2.0 conference at Duke University as Lynne d. Johnson was discussing her participation in New York-based online discussion groups during the early 1990s. Now, I had first encountered "lynne d. johnson" in the late 1990s when I became a participant on Alondra Nelson's afrofuturism (AF) list serve. Mark Anthony Neal was there. Nalo Hopkinson was there, and many, many more were on the list serve.

Turns out, Lynne had arrived to the AF list from various other techy spots such as "New York Online." On the panel at Black Thought 2.0, she was running down some of her participation with online bulletin boards and list serves. She was briefly sketching her interactions with folks who got later major black sites rolling. Her narratives were a useful glance into the early years of an exciting black online or digital world that was accompanied by analog organizing in New York City. (I wish the panel moderator had asked her to say even more).

Mark Antony Neal could probably provide related narratives about his engagements with black technological communities that led him to afrofuturism and beyond. And then consider Nalo Hopkinson, a speculative fiction writer, whose social travels led her to AF as well. There was also the black film scholar Anna Everett, who eventually coordinated a series of AfroGeek conferences at the University of California, Santa Barbara in [2004](#) and [2005](#). Oh, and the poet Tracie Morris, an AF participant, has a long history of producing thoughtful experiments that merge sound and verse.

There are way too many participants in these intellectual tech histories to identify, too many projects to easily summarize. Nonetheless, attempting to chart some of the interactions and common participants in various locales over the years could help us to account for the development and dispersal of an expansive body of ideas. We begin to see clearer pictures of how we get from "New York Online" to "Black Planet" and afrofuturism to the AfroGeeks conferences to Black Thought 2.0.