

Resetting Black Thought in the Age of Social Media

by Camille Jackson | Duke Today

Scholars will discuss how social media enhances their teaching and allows them to reach new audience

Durham, NC - What would have happened if NAACP co-founder W.E.B. DuBois had Twitter? Or Harriet Tubman or any number of great black leaders of the past? Social media tools like Twitter have allowed a micro community of African-American scholars to teach in a public sphere, helping shape opinion in real time on current events.

More than a dozen of these prominent scholars will gather this weekend for a conference on the role of social media in cultural studies.

The two-day conference, "Black Thought 2.0: New Media and the Future of Black Studies," will be held at the John Hope Franklin Center (2204 Erwin Road) and is free and open to the public. (To register, [click here](#).) Parking is available in the Pickens Center visitor lot across the street.

The program begins tonight with a 7 p.m. keynote address by S. Craig Watkins, the author of "The Young & the Digital." A reception will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the John Hope Franklin Center gallery.

For those unable to attend, the conference will be streamed live on [Duke's Ustream channel](#), and viewers can tweet questions for the panelists using the hashtag #BT2Duke.

Watkins is a communications professor at the University of Texas at Austin and researches young people's social and digital media behaviors.

The conference continues Saturday at 9 a.m. with panels "The Chocolate Supa Highway: Precursors to Black Social Media," and "On the Grid: Teaching and Researching in the Digital Age." Afternoon panels begin at 1:30 with "From Jena, La. to Tahrir Square: Activism in the Age of Social Media," and at 3 p.m. with "The Twitterati and Twitter-gentsia: Social Media and Public Intellectuals."

"In many ways Black Thought 2.0 is an attempt to encourage black scholars and academics to catch up to our audience," said conference organizer Mark Anthony Neal, a professor of black popular culture at Duke who has more than 11,000 Twitter followers.

"Given our rich tradition of public intellectuals, dating back to figures like Fredrick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, it just seems as though new media represents another way for black intellectuals to be in the world. Imagine what W.E.B. Dubois might have done with a Twitter feed?"

Other panelists include Jasiri X, a rapper who recently released "Trayvon," a tribute song for the slain teen; author Marc Lamont Hill, an education professor at Columbia University and the host

of the nationally syndicated TV One program "Our World With Black Enterprise"; and Moya Bailey, a blogger for Crunk Feminist Collection best known for organizing a protest as an undergraduate student at Spelman College against the rapper Nelly. Several Duke faculty will participate in the conference as well.

Neal will discuss the conference Friday at noon on WUNC-FM's ["The State of Things"](#) broadcast.

The conference is sponsored by Duke's Department of African and African American Studies, the John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies, Left of Black and the Office of the Provost.

For more information, [click here](#).