

## [The New Public Intellectual: Utilizing Social Media at Black Thought 2.0](#)

by Faithe Day | HASTAC

Critiques of the “Ivory Tower” of academia have been levied for many years against academic institutions but in the final panel of Black Thought 2.0 there was a greater discussion of what it means to be a public intellectual in the 21st century and how social media is changing that definition. The fact that there has been some [recent discussion on HASTAC](#) about the use of the term “public intellectual” shows that social media is greatly changing the way that we interpret the idea of being “public” and the role or designation of the intellectual. Marc Anthony Neal (@NewBlackMan) was the moderator for this panel and he had previously published a video that asked the question “[What if W.E.B. Du Bois had a Twitter](#)” coming to the conclusion that Du Bois would have been a prolific tweeter. This references the history of Black public intellectuals that were invested in being accessible to and mobilizing their community. As Neal noted during the panel Martin Luther King Jr. would frequent pool halls in order to talk to people outside of his church community about social issues.

In the same way that MLK Jr. went outside of the community closest to him to impact a greater number of people, I believe that academics are being challenged to do the same thing. As it was stated during the panel social media, such as Twitter, gives intellectuals of all races the chance to interact with a wider community in a more accessible way. As Latoya Peterson pointed out most people have little information about what it means to be an academic and part of the importance of visibility and accessibility in academia as a professor and/or public intellectual is that we can address the misconceptions that people have towards or about academia. Not only is this a refutation of the “Ivory Tower” (mis)conception of academia but it also gives academics the chance to be active (an issue that was discussed in the third panel “[From Jena Louisiana to Tahrir Square: Activism in the Age of Social Media](#)”). Marc Lamont Hill of Columbia University discussed the trend towards romanticizing the role of discussion within academia by stating that it is important to remember that as academics we cannot just “think deeply” about things or talk on Twitter but being active is truly about getting out and doing something in one’s community.

The final idea that I found to be very important was a statement made by Latoya Peterson in which she said that there should be a move toward a “public embracing of intellectualism” which to me could be considered the role of the public intellectual in the 21st century. Not just to sit in a college or university and discuss issues and social change with those that are already interested in intellectualism but to actually utilize any platform of social media to broadcast your intellect into the public sphere. Everyone has their own community in which they can try and enact change, which might be just as simple as tweeting some interesting thoughts from a conference that you attended or posing a question to your Facebook friends. All of these example start discussion, and many times discussion is the beginning of active social change.