INTERCHAPTER DIALOGUE FOR CHAPTER 5

Iris: I've learned so much from reading this chapter. We have a lot of different things going on here: digital expressions of Black English (BE) or African American vernacular English (AAVE), which intersects digital and cultural literacies (and rhetorics), as well as social movements. Alex, could you please expand a little bit upon how researching Black Twitter generates this thinking and how we should understand and navigate this rich form of online cultural expression?

Alex: Sure, I'll begin by saying that Black Twitter is a vexed rhetorical object because it's hard for outsiders to recognize and know it. It is also a public performance of Black cultural invention. The mainstream news, for example, often capitalizes on Black Twitter's knowledge, citing tweets without credit or casually referring to Black Twitter as an authority on cultural critique. Therefore, Black Twitter represents Black media and journalism. It also functions as a culture and community capable of organizing, promoting, and/or archiving social movements. Take, for instance, the popularity of #BlackLivesMatter, which is the most famous hashtag to be attributed to Black Twitter. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrice Cullors developed that expression when they were grieving over the death of Trayvon Martin and discussing their outrage about the acquittal of George Zimmerman. These events reverberated loudly against waves of anti-Black police brutality. Of course, Black Twitter does not represent "all Black people" using Twitter. We aren't a monolith, nor do we all know each other. But a long history of segregation is reflected in how we socialize online, as our associations appear to be tightly networked.

The phenomenon of Black Twitter shows that we are using social media to produce and preserve our culture. However, Twitter is a for-profit platform and publisher, and thus mediates our culture with the power to popularize or marginalize our rhetoric and knowledge, which becomes part of the flow of capital when it gets appropriated into the content of mainstream media. These are some of the reasons that it's difficult to make claims about the transformative or liberatory power of Black Twitter. Specifying when Black Twitter has something going on is challenging because unless you're an insider, you may not even know. Twitter moves so fast, as does Black culture. So that's the other component of the research: looking at Black Twitter as a digital enactment of race helps us understand the analog performances of race and the constructedness of those performances through our network interaction.

Overall, studying Black Twitter is important because it reflects the complex relationship between race and language, labor and culture.

Iris: You seem suspicious of cultural authenticity, which you connect to the problem of cultural appropriation. Could you speak more about the relationship between authenticity and Black Twitter?

Alex: Well, authenticity is an inextricable problem of race. Subsequently, trust and distrust drive the engines of racism.

An obvious example is the phenomenon of colorism and passing. The one-drop rule made it possible to categorize even the fairest skinned person as "Black." But skin color was hardly the only factor that played a role in whether a person could pass. Speech, body type, movement, educational attainment and affiliation, among other characteristics, would contribute to a persuasive performance of whiteness. Thus, the decision to live as White meant uprooting, migrating, and living one's life in secrecy. The cost of that extreme decision was Black cultural erasure and divisiveness within the community.

We could also consider 19th century Black writers and rhetors who were publicly representing their experiences in various ways. As Toni Morrison argues in *The Site of Memory,* slave narratives disrupted societal expectations of Black literacy. Taking advantage of mass media and making our knowledge visible is part of the Black literary and rhetorical tradition. Black Twitter follows this intellectual heritage, as it is commonly associated with Black cultural expression as a tool of resisting whiteness. But as I pointed out earlier and in my chapter, Black Twitter (and Black people) are not a monolith. Users will have varying opinions about Black Twitter's liberatory potential. Nevertheless, it can be interpreted as a counter-public that has generated one of the most successful social movements centered on race and civil rights since the 1960s.

Black Twitter unquestionably highlights the issue of race, especially in terms of explicit calls to end systemic racism and white supremacy (#BLM). This political communication is conveyed through Black English and digital rhetorical forms such as memes, hashtagging, etc. That distinctive expression of blackness that we're seeing online influences how other communities signify their identity. We can, for instance, observe seamless appropriations of what Black Twitter is doing because now there's Asian Twitter, Academic Twitter, Twitterstorians, Science Twitter, and so on. Arguably, Black Twitter made it possible for the invention and spread of all these additional "spaces" for people to represent their interests.

Perhaps it is the "realness" evoked by "authentic" Black discourse that is persuasive to outsiders—when they recognize persuasive uses of Black rhetorical forms that they can claim for their own discourse communities. Unfortunately, such appropriation often fails to cite or compensate the creators and literate

users of these forms. In other words, when Black cultural production becomes popular, suddenly it is public domain. It's not even Black anymore: now the cultural contribution just belongs to everybody. In some cases, only a few people actually capitalize on it. The Kardashian sisters most quickly come to mind. They have profited from aesthetics that have traditionally caused Black women to be hypersexualized—plumped lips, large buttocks, etc.

Remember that controversial *Paper* photoshoot featuring Kim Kardashian posing as Saartje Baartman? Baartman, as many people may know, was a South African Khoikhoi woman who was enslaved and put on 19th century European exhibitions throughout her life. Also known as the Hottentot Venus, Baartman's body continued to be on display in France long after her death (until at least the 1970s). Given the horrific racist, sexist, and colonialist treatment of Baartman, it is appalling for Kardashian to continue to fetishize Baartman—and by extension Black Women—for the purposes of popularizing her brand as an ethnically ambiguous, fair-skinned bombshell socialite that picks and chooses which Black features she puts on and takes off without any of the stigma of actually being Black. Kardashian's wealth, fame, and influence make it impossible to ignore the destructive aspects of this type of appropriation.

Iris: Thank you. In your chapter, you mention that Black Twitter follows a long tradition of Black media such *Freedom's Journal* (the oldest Black newspaper), the *Chicago Defender*, *Ebony*, etc. These outlets rejected the racist mainstream press by centering Black life and excellence. Historically speaking, some argue that social justice movements have often been centered upon the Black experience and leadership. How does this perception relate to Black Twitter?

Alex: When we talk about the Black experience, I'll refer to Morrison again, who claims that our historical narratives have been veiled. The formerly enslaved, when composing slave narratives, for example, faced the inability to explore one's creative resources publicly. For Morrison, this is the charge of the Black writer. When we look at the fact that Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors coined what is literally the most well-known hashtag associated with Black Twitter—Black Lives Matter—we see that Black Women originated and collaboratively organized this contemporary social movement, as Black Women so often do. When you think about feminist social movements in the US, Black Women made huge contributions by speaking publicly about race and gender. Maria W. Stewart, inspired by David Walker's *Appeal to Colored Citizens*, is considered to be the first Black Woman documented giving speeches (she kept a record of them) in about 1832.

Meanwhile, White American feminists tended to completely separate the issue of suffrage for White Women and Black people, favoring a platform that wouldn't be "distracted" by the "race problem." We have faced major solidarity

challenges since, which were intensified by the fact that White Women could also be cruel slave mistresses and get any Black person (but especially men) punished at mere suggestion of them looking at her, talking to her "out of turn," and for no reason at all other than wielding White power. Clearly, Black and White Women continue to have racial issues because the outcomes of the 2016 election showed that White feminists failed to secure a more progressive vote from the vast majority of their demographic. Over 90 percent of Black Women voters, by contrast, showed up at the polls for Hillary Clinton even though she wasn't necessarily their most preferred candidate. Personally, I'm always having to deal with being caught between race and gender, which is accompanied by the problem of invisibility. Far too often, Black Women's intellectual and cultural production, as well as our political activism, fails to receive credit. Our work almost always gets absorbed in a patriarchal racial discourse. This erasure happens to other women of color as well.

This context needs to be acknowledged because it demonstrates some of the potential dangers of Black Twitter circulating in pop culture. A hashtag like #BLM generates more hashtags like #ICantBreathe and #NotJustUVA. To be sure, civil rights is no longer organized around a fixed, central body of leadership. In fact, this is why it is difficult to study and talk about. Rather, it's a digital, globally distributed social movement. That's what makes Black Lives Matter distinctive. It emerged from a historically continuous present. What emerged from a spontaneous but tirelessly ongoing and repetitive conversation about Black pain and suffering came from three women having a conversation. Their quasi-public deliberation about how crazy it was that Trayvon Martin, a teenager, could face sudden demise while he was simply walking home. "Enough," they said. And others agreed. Millions and millions of people agreed. So #BLM begins a new chapter in the long fight for Civil Rights. #BlackLivesMatter has been very effective at initiating and sustaining a national conversation about race and criminality. Coalitions have emerged like #SayHerName and #CiteBlackWomen. In sum, Black Women have always played a major role in the tradition of fighting for Civil Rights. Unfortunately, they aren't always given their proper due.

Chris: Considerations of race, gender, and intersectionality are always present in your work, Alex. I was fortunate enough to direct your Master's thesis "Hidden in the Backwaters: The Legacy of Blues Women." I also read your dissertation on leak culture. Both of these projects engage these issues with technology, media, and information systems.

In this most recent work, I noticed that you're engaging with Alessandra Raengo's idea of liquid blackness. The liquid metaphor runs continuously throughout your research. Could you comment on that? I'm interested in what

you see as some of the through lines of your research and how they have led to your current work.

Alex: I have long been critical of the perspective that the internet would liberate us from social injustices like racism and sexism. In fact, this is one of those "dominant ideologies" that I'm resisting by using a Critical Technological Discourse Analysis throughout my chapter.

As a Web 1.0 user, and a teen, I recall the dilemmas I faced in chat rooms, discussion forums, and newsgroups as a Black Woman. I used to play with various avatars of different genders and races for profile images to see how it would affect my interactions. Then several years later, around 2007 or so, Facebook opened their platform to everyone outside of college networks, requiring its users to provide their real names. While there's a culture of say, Black Women users, who embed hacker names in their Facebook identities (e.g., LouiseBrown-BabyDollSmith), most users blindly traded some of their protected personally identifying info for the ability to join the neatly organized interface that used to be exclusive to college students.

When social media became more global, it became more obviously political. Around 2008, I noticed entities like WikiLeaks emerging. WikiLeaks started affecting public discourses about government transparency, corruption, and the political role of hackers in the 21st century. Although Julian Assange is hardly a trustworthy messenger, as WikiLeaks' meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections showed, his organization made it clear that Web 2.0 platforms scaled data production. Additionally, surveillance and leaks could be weaponized by everyday people, which used to be an affordance that was exclusive to government intelligence agencies. Now, Folks be spying back!

Equipped with mobile devices, cameras, and an internet connection, most people are capable of documenting any event they participate in or just happen upon. Consequently, surveillance has become more and more democratized. There's been a major increase in leaks because people are sharing information that they think needs to be shared. Secrets and cover-ups are more salacious in this context because internet users are drowning in data. Another aspect of this scene to consider is how we talk about progress and technology. For example, should we still be describing social media networks as "new?"

This language of novelty bothers me because we risk erasing histories of science and technology. With this in mind, I analyze technology while being aware of the fact that there's always a time "when old technologies were new"—which is the title of a book written by Carolyn Marvin. While reading Marvin's book, I was also reading Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms* for a grad seminar entitled "Jazz and Blues in American Literature." Her philosophical analysis and exhaustive transcription of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey's work in-

spired me to consider how these women utilized emerging technologies of their day. After all, they utilized the phonograph and radio to communicate to mass audiences. They also performed Vaudeville shows, traveling with the Theatre Owner's Booking Association (TOBA), which involved (emerging new) transportation technologies like the railroad and trains. During the 1920s, these mass communication technologies made it possible for dozens and dozens of working-class Black Women, regardless of their ability to "read and write," to tell their story. This research on Blueswomen's use of Black rhetoric and new technologies made me develop a more nuanced way of theorizing composition. I became much more critical about assuming that the written word is the supreme marker of "civilization," or the ultimate measures of literacy and intelligence.

Blueswomen also taught me a lot about the taboo of disclosure, writ large and within the Black community. They were subjected to the politics of respectability. Blueswomen were shut out of Black Women's clubs by their educated, middle- to upper-class sisters for being "unladylike." Their racy lyrics covered topics like lesbianism and gender fluidity (Ma Rainey's "Prove it on Me"), domestic violence (Bessie Smith's "T'aint Nobody's Business if I Do" and "I've Been Mistreated and I Don't Like It"), alcoholism (Bessie Smith's "Me and My Gin"), trifling romantic partners (Bessie Smith's "Pinchbacks, Take Em' Away," and "Aggravatin' Papa (Don't You Try to Two-Time")), natural disasters (Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues"), police brutality (Rosa Henderson's "Chicago Policeman Blues"), imprisonment (Bessie Smith's "Jailhouse Blues"), widespread illnesses (Victoria Spivey's "T.B. Blues"), promiscuity (Bessie Smith's "Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl"), superstitions (Bessie Smith's "Blue Spirit Blues"), and even scathing critiques of racism and sexism (Bessie Smith's "Poor Man's Blues" and "Washwoman Blues").[1] These narratives forced Blueswomen into an underground culture of the nightlife. They were pushed to the edges of Black culture at the turn of the 20th century, but they were also the first to record popular music in a genre designated "race records." Despite criticisms about their sinful "low-brow" lifestyles, artists like Bessie Smith sold hundreds of thousands of records to Black consumers struggling for mobility and self-definition in the (then) new century. These sales enabled Black people to be recognized as viable consumers as new forms of entertainment became part of a post-agrarian industrial economy.

I continued to be interested in the issue of disclosure and its relationship to technology. However, I turned my attention to leaks during my Ph.D. because I was concerned by the lack of scholarly attention to hate speech, online harassment, and the increase of leaks in all forms from Chelsea Manning's leaking of

1 See Appendix B. You can access these songs at http://bit.ly/YouTubePlaylistRRRM

the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs and the U.S. Embassy cables to large corporations like Target and Macy's leaking consumer data. Even the Pentagon couldn't seem to "protect" user information. Leaks seemed everywhere, but little analysis of them seemed to be happening anywhere, with exception of Glenn Greenwald and Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* I paid close attention to how the language of Watergate became part of the conversation about WikiLeaks. So I applied my inquiry about "when old technologies were new," which helped me come across William Burroughs' *The Electronic Revolution*, in which he forecasts the mass distribution of aural technologies. In this book, he talks specifically about tape recorders and the way they would create "the word virus." This concept will influence my research on Black Twitter beyond this project because I'm eager to start writing a racial theory of contagion.

Chris: Could you elaborate a little bit more on Burroughs's concept of "the word virus?" I'm fascinated that you are turning to Burroughs's work to make sense of Watergate. I don't want to move us too far away from Black Twitter, but I really want to know more how his theories might tell us more about the socio-political relationship between the Beats and the Black Power Movement.

Alex: Sure! I can address this concept, and I'll be sure to relate it to Black Twitter. But y'all got to bear with me, cuz it's a very long answer.

Burroughs's work made me think about leaks and the inevitability of Watergate. I've always been inspired by American counter-culture, whether Conjurefolk, Blueswomen, Transcendentalists, Beats, Hippies, Black Panthers, Psychedelic Researchers, Hip-Hop, Punk, etc. On one hand, you could say these identities have been commodified in commercials, t-shirt slogans, and all kinds of stuff. However, my research makes it clear that nearly all of these cultures are threatening to the government. Wherever the government is trying to shut down a certain kind of aesthetic or inclusive political agenda, they go after solidarity. They seek to destroy social contact among so-called radicals through a systemic mechanism like COINTELPRO. But activists and artists used their work to make it clear that the truth was that white supremacy and patriarchy were self-destructive, violent systems that would kill us all through their cruelty and incompetence. Sorry for the frankness, but I need us to understand the level of fear that I live with daily.

When researching leaks, I was asking categorical questions about Watergate that are similar to those I ask about Black Twitter. I wondered, "What the hell is Watergate?" I knew it was a literal place, but when most people refer to Watergate, they mean this sprawling, convoluted drama about criminality that goes to the highest level. In that case, the American public questioned whether our justice system was capable of delivering "justice for all" when presidential power can be used for immunity. Within that vastness that is Watergate—which was

happening during the spread of the Black Power Movement, the birth of Black studies, and perpetual incidents of police brutality—I asked, "How is race operating in this narrative?" I then discovered that the man responsible for the entire Watergate affair was a Black security guard by the name of Frank Wills. And with that discovery, the names in the Watergate drama told as much of the story as the events themselves. Wills willed Watergate.

Watergate introduced all kinds of leaky language into the hemisphere; the signs came to life through the names of characters and places—how you gonna gate Water?—and organizations—the folks who funded the political sabotage were literally CREEPs, or Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President, and so on. It is important to note that the entire trial was a leak drama. It exemplified Burroughs's "word virus" or humans' inability to control the spread of data.

Burroughs defines a virus as "a very small unit of word and image . . . [that] can be biologically activated to act as communicable virus strains." He says that the virus "reminds you of its unwanted presence." This quote made me think long and hard about what information means in this century. What are the "unwanted presences" of information, how do they become visible?

From Blueswomen to Watergate to WikiLeaks to Black Twitter, each of these subjects revealed something about the rhetorical significance of disclosure.

Iris: Could you say more about Wills, or more about how you see Watergate as connected to race?

Alex: Absolutely. Wills noticed the tape on the door where the five men in suits, four Cubans and one ex-CIA officer, James McCord,[2] entered to retrieve some wiretapping equipment that was used to bug Nixon's democratic rivals. Wills called the police and the men were arrested. This one incident set in motion a lengthy trial that unraveled the vast scope of cover-up and control culture.

Watergate connects to race because this is the same culture that designed and authorized programs of mass surveillance against Black Americans. Watergate showed how expansive the government was when executing its militaristic destruction of progressive movements. I researched how the news covered Frank Wills. Once again, I became immersed in the fact of our history of segregation. The Black press had a very different depiction of Wills than the mainstream papers. Many outlets hailed him as the hero of Watergate. He even won an NAACP image award in the late seventies for his role in cracking open the scandal. However, he barely got a blip in the national press and rarely was his race mentioned. The differences in depictions sparked my interest in Black perspectives on the whole matter of "intelligence" and surveillance, just as it was

2 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_W._McCord_Jr.

when I turned to the Black papers for knowledge about Blues women and how the phonograph, radio, and film were being received by the Black community.

Chris: Earlier, you mentioned counter-cultures and counter-publics. How is the idea of a counter-public useful in discussing Black Twitter, and what are its inadequacies?

Alex: Many researchers have labeled Black Twitter as a counter-public. I understand their reasoning. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag evolved into both a social movement and target of law enforcement. Large-scale fraud has been committed in its name. Right-wing pundits accuse its supporters of being "anarchists" and "terrorists" to stoke national fear. Race is at the center of this reception. Folks don't want to talk about the state of race relations right now, but it's unavoidable. Trump has successfully energized white nationalists. Now, I don't know who you imagine, but these people aren't just everyday Billys and Joes from the Deep South. I'm talking about our congresspeople, political advisors, and billionaires. Their hate for poor and colored people is more transparent than ever, so any visibility of folks speaking out is ripe for spreading widely. Thus, Black Twitter is absolutely a counter-public in the Twitterverse. The very name signifies the ongoing racism that leads to systemic racism and segregation. It reflects and affects how knowledge spreads throughout ecologies. It is a traceable entity that offers a record of how everyday people respond to injustice, as well as how they sought to connect with other users over shared cultural experiences, or how they laughed or cried.

But as I discussed earlier in our dialogue, we must always keep in mind that Twitter is a company, a publisher, and a public. How it moves affects what Black Twitter is. At any time, its users can be impacted by who owns and controls Twitter. As we speak, Paul Singer—the Republican billionaire—just purchased a huge stake in Twitter. It's rumored that he's trying to oust Dorsey and change company policies like their recent ban on political advertising. We must be wary of interpreting any communication that takes place on a for-profit platform as "revolutionary" or "liberatory."

Chris: Do scholars need to rethink the idea of counter-publics, given those problems of commodification, and given the participation of sophisticated bots in online political discourse?

Alex: Yes, I think so. We aren't just dealing with human agents in the current media scene. We talkin' bout a fully realized post-nuclear age complete with automation and what seems to be the collapse of the US as a symbol of democracy and freedom. However, we ain't gonna see no sudden total collapse of our country's military power. But we will see how global access to the internet exposes the U.S. security vulnerabilities as more and more countries see how easy it is to hack our systems. For example, the Chinese hacking of Equifax is a clear case of the political

complexity of now. Who are the politicians who actually center issues of internet freedom, cybersecurity, or algorithmic bias at the core of their campaigns? The lack of policies regarding our data infrastructures may lead people to spend so much of their time criticizing culture that they get caught up in a constant loop of social media sharing that doesn't transform offline action much. I'm not saying critique isn't a good thing, or that a social movement should be written off if people aren't marching in the streets. I also don't want to marginalize the effectiveness of local grassroots activism. But folks be doing a whole lot of talking and a whole lot of re-sharing other people's content while thinking they are meaningfully contributing to a movement like #MeToo or #BLM. Testifying is definitely a necessary part of the process of theorizing about social change, but telling stories without also seeking out strategies to solve problems weakens the meaning of movements.

Iris: Thank you for that detailed clarification! It worries me that the concept of social justice seems to be more and more watered down. Lots of people try to use rhetorical appeals to being "woke" as a way to appear ethical or to stake out research territory or drum up speaking gigs. Black Twitter doesn't seem to be seeking out popularity, so there's something authentic about some of the posts. I found the connections you draw between journalists and social media were interesting in that way. Black Twitter is making people reimagine how activism looks.

But I hope you will conclude this dialogue by talking more about how you use government data in your chapter. I was really caught by surprise by your inclusion of the Mueller report and COINTELPRO. I am also interested in this history. I include it in my ethnic studies courses, especially when we discuss the Black Panthers. My question is related to that section. Why did you feel it necessary to bring in this information and connection? How does it inform Black Twitter? Black cultural expression? Black identity?

Alex: Since my chapter focuses on the challenges of studying Black Twitter, I thought it was relevant to examine some of the political context that contributes to the issue of race, technology, and information. Plenty of studies have already been done about how Black Twitter is political—such as the impact of popular hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter. Few studies include considerations of how emerging technologies have always been weaponized to deploy disinformation strategies that rely on racism to divide people. Wherever we are examining performances of racial identity, such as the language acts that constitute Black Twitter, it is critical to think about how race affects the meaning of privacy. Historically, privacy is not something that can be afforded to anyone without property, let alone those who were legally defined as such. The matter of Black people as property marked their bodies as publicly available for sale, to be managed and disciplined under a system of surveillance that they managed to hack. Equipped with creative spiritual and linguistic resources representing various parts of the

African continent, the enslaved took advantage of their oppressor's lack of this knowledge. They organized information systems through complex multimodal texts and codes for mapping under extreme duress while also facing the risk of punishment for reading and writing. Through this illegal communication, as well as song, quilt, and knowledge of star systems, for example, enslaved Black people could locate one another, provide directions towards freedom, and potentially preserve some aspects of their ancestral cultures.

Having lived in this world and the segregated one that would follow, Black people continue to struggle over the meaning of privacy as offline and online realities have merged and surveillance has become ubiquitous. Everyone with a mobile phone and internet access is a walking camera with instantaneous access to free mass publishing platforms. Whereas in the past, Black life could be more carefully coded and controlled within our local communities away from the gaze of White people, as well as through Black media like *Jet*, *Essence*, and *Ebony* magazines, which for decades represented only the "best" of our leaders, entrepreneurs, entertainers, etc., the internet distributes blackness in its variety and location. Access to Black cultural expression has scaled, which complicates how blackness is performed and recognized. The problem of how to determine who is *really* Black, similar to the question of who was *really* down with the Black Power Movement during the 60s and 70s and not an informant, is exposed by 4chan trolls and the IRA's expansive, expensive attempts to divide online Black social media communities. Of course, Black feminists like Hudson and Crockett, as well as the moderators of r/BlackPeopleTwitter, who actively battle disinformation, demonstrate that insider knowledge about Black cultural expression like Black English isn't as simple to replicate as outsiders may think. Online performances are just as multiple, just as complicated as offline, and in fact are affected by their manifestations in each social space.

James: What do you think about the coalitional possibilities of Black Twitter? More specifically, what do you think about other people of color participating in Black Twitter? Are there common threads where certain people of color should be invited in? Or should Black Twitter exist solely for Black folks?

Alex: I appreciate that question because it raises questions about what the BIPOC have in common, in terms of language and discourses. Twitter is one thing that users of any color have in common. Next, there are certain ways of communicating that signify particular discourses. The performative nature of race becomes much more visible online, then, because an avatar or profile image can hardly serve as an "authentication" of a person's race. Offline, skin is the first thing people see along with other racialized characteristics. Next, we are racially marked by the way we talk (e.g., *talking Black, talking Back, talking "proper," or sounding White, being articulate,* etc.).

Online, racial performance is even more dependent on linguistic expression. This is why critical technological discourse analysis is an appropriate method for studying Black Twitter. Black English, for example, is one of the social languages that you might find via Black Twitter. However, meme sharing is a major form of communication that drives posts, threads, re-tweets, etc. Meme sharing is a language practice employed by most internet users. It is not exclusive to Black Twitter. As I mentioned earlier, Black Twitter is not independent of Twitter, the company. No one is "invited" to Black Twitter. Lots of people flex with the hashtags and they either get liked and reshared or they don't. No one can control, say, Asian or Latinx participation, unless those users aren't adept enough with language to "fit in" with the rest of that crowd.

In fact, I did come across a study during my research about how Black Twitter influences the ways in which other marginalized groups engage on Twitter. Deen Freelon, Lori Lopez, Meredith D. Clark, and Sarah J. Jackson co-wrote a report for the Knight Foundation in 2018, entitled, "How Black Twitter and Other Social Media Communities Interact with Mainstream News." That report looks at how #BlackTwitter, #AsianTwitter, and #FeministTwitter are increasingly replacing the mainstream news as some users' main source of information. Their report looks at some popular hashtags like #Asians4BlackLives to demonstrate how these "subcultures" (note: their term not mine, I definitely prefer counter-public or to refer to them as discourses since they are symbolic communications) build on and overlap with each other and #BlackTwitter.

The issue regarding POC's engagement with Black Twitter that concerns me is whether they show up when Black lives are really at stake. Anti-blackness is too real and frequently happens unconsciously—both within and outside of the Black community. Digital Blackface and cultural tourism are a problem, but Black people have resisted stereotyping and racial fraud in mass media since the minstrel show (and obviously before that as evidenced by slave narratives).

Black Twitter provides some relief from the pressure to hide one's blackness from the stifling White gaze. But I have to constantly question whether users are having a shared experience. Are me and the Asian woman looking at the bougie aunt meme and laughing for the same reasons? The reason for the laughter matters to me. I worry that negative stereotypes of Black people permeate how other POC engage us as a community. To be sure, some POC are cool, but some ain't, and definitely not the culture vultures that are looking to appropriate Black English and culture for social and monetary gains. Luckily, identity performance online tends to follow the same rules as speech acts happening offline. Basically, the crowd will determine if a POC user is "down" by the way they respond to their participation.

This concern brings me back to Iris' questions about authenticity. It matters how blackness appears to outsiders, and who ultimately battles over and controls that image. Violent, racialized surveillance has always played a role in the fight for literacy, the battle over Blackness as a commodity vs. cultural identity, and how the Black community hacks anti-Blackness through spontaneous interactions that rely on a certain shared knowledge of form, historical references, pop culture happenings.

Overall, this issue is mediated by the politics of state-sponsored surveillance and how social media platforms simultaneously empower the spread of misinformation tactics while also providing a space for the marginalized to "clap back," so to speak. In sum, the phenomenon of Black Twitter and how it is valued and how it will be studied must take into account how complex Black culture and its language practices are, as well as the history of data warfare that I've discussed throughout this dialogue.

WORKS CITED

Burroughs, William S. *Electronic Revolution*. Originally published in 1970 by Expanded Media Editions and republished by Ubuclassics 2005, katab.asia/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Burroughs-electronic_revolution.pdf.

Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. Vintage, 2011.

Freelon, Deen, et al. "How Black Twitter and Other Social Media Communities Interact with Mainstream News." *Knight Foundation*, 27 Feb. 2018, knightfoundation.org/features/twittermedia/.

"Image Award Presentations Bring Out Top Show Stars." *Jet Magazine*, 7 Feb. 1974, bit.ly/3dkJisn.

Marvin, Carolyn. *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Oxford UP, 1988.

Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited by William Zinsser. 1987.