Book
Reviews

Editorial note: Book reviews are lightly edited for clarity and typographical errors.

Reviews

BLASIAN INVASION: Racial Mixing in the Celebrity Industrial Complex. By Myra S. Washington. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

Contextualized by mixed-race, branding and celebrity studies, *Blasian Invasion* uses the concept of Blasian to expand the discourse around racial mixing beyond the centralizing of whiteness. Myra S. Washington uses Blasian to refer to individuals who "self-identify with these socially constructed racial/ethnic categories of Black and Asian/American" (6). Focusing on celebrities ranging from lesser known video models to highly recognizable stars like Tiger Woods and Dwayne Johnson (aka The Rock), the book examines the various ways that individuals fashion Blasian identities and how those identities are perceived by audiences.

Washington's book makes a significant intervention in mixed-race studies by positing a different dynamic for minority-minority mixed-race identity. Drawing on the history and scholarship of Afro-Asian interaction, the book challenges the use of the multiracial movement as an adequate lens with which to interrogate Blasian identity. Washington argues that the multiracial movement erases Black identity and other identities of color in favor of a generalized mixed-race identity. However, Blasian not only foregrounds these racial identities, but also interrogates the boundaries of each. Blasian identity is ever-changing, an identity that is chosen rather than imposed by others. Celebrity status represents another layer of Washington's analysis, which focuses on the impact of branding and Blasian identity. Identity becomes the brand, thus making identity a kind of commodity that has various levels of legibility by different audiences.

The book reveals the impact that gender has on how Blasian identities are used and read. Washington's analysis of Tiger Woods, Hines Ward and Dwayne Johnson reveals the ways that nationality and masculinity are filtered by Blasian identity in different ways, showing that multiple factors are in play when making sense of the discourse around minority-minority mixed-race identity. The notion of the Black male athlete as driven by powerful yet dangerous natural abilities is one that has been ascribed to Black athletes in sports ranging from boxing to baseball. The book traces the trajectory of Tiger Woods's Blasian identity vis-à-vis this notion of black masculinity. Initially defined as a Black

athlete who largely escaped the dangerous characterization by participating in the "intellectual" sport of golf, Woods's marital scandal made him subject to the same stereotypes of earlier Black athletes. Wood's Blasian identity has transnational implications, and links him to Ward and Johnson, who also navigate not only racial but national identities. Though such analyses, Washington shows that mixed-race identities also involve the ways that national cultures are perceived in ways that bring into play histories of colonialism and imperialism, taking the discussion beyond the United States. At the same time, Washington shows how Blasian identity plays out differently for women through her case study of Kimora Lee Simmons, who is integral to the creation and maintenance of her identity as a brand. Depending on the context, Simmons displays a flexible Blasian identity, one that is cognizant of the different ways women of color are perceived. While Washington's analysis of male celebrities draws on how they talk about their status, the Simmons' example shows how her decisions regarding her fashion and product lines show the material ways she crafts Blasian identity.

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TEACHING WITH DIGITAL HUMANITIES: Tools and Methods for Nineteenth-Century American Literature. By Jennifer Travis and Jessica DeSpain. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018.

I made the mistake of reviewing Jennifer Travis and Jessica DeSpain's edited collection *Teaching with Digital Humanities* (2018) over Winter Break—*after* my book orders and syllabi were finalized. This is high praise for its fifteen vibrant essays, which adroitly erode the barriers of entry for incorporating DH pedagogy into classrooms. Organized by five keywords or "tags" (the verbs Make, Read, Recover, Archive, and Act), the essays range considerably in scope, from the big data trends in Blair Best et al.'s analysis of dramatic scripts to the granular textual annotations in Wyn Kelley's Melville course. They are accessible and useful even to readers unfamiliar with the technical aspects of DH. Beyond providing step-by-step explanations of their digital projects' conceptualizations, implementations, and evaluations, the authors consistently and candidly recount their failures. Their thoughtful meditations on redressing missteps and better meeting unanticipated challenges embolden readers who might otherwise feel intimidated by the prospect of developing or employing DH methods in their own courses.

Ashley Reed's essay on digitizing and collaboratively annotating *Prudence Person's Scrapbook*, for example, courageously frames Phase One of that classroom project as a "negative lesson on how *not* to launch a digital project" (25). The problem, she explains, was twofold: on the one hand, "students simply didn't have the historical-cultural knowledge that would allow them to correctly situate these texts in their nineteenth-century milieu" (31); on the other hand, she enumerates the "somewhat ludicrous" list of specialized (digital *and* analog) skills the project demanded of introductory-level non-English majors. Reed helpfully pinpoints a challenge pervasive in the volume: how do instructors balance finite class time between providing literary-historical context, training students with new digital tools (some with steep learning curves), and actually building digital projects?

The essays' collective and compelling response is that these competing demands are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually informative. Contributors consistently argue that digital methods actually share much in common with the technologies, aesthetics, and politics of nineteenth-century literary culture: Ryan Cordell, Benjamin Doyle, and Elizabeth Hopwood use an early republican invention—the kaleidoscope—as a heuristic

for cultivating collaborative classrooms; August Rohrbach et al. show how Emerson's transcendental philosophy on knowledge production directly shaped her class's *Digital Emerson: A Collective Archive*; Cynthia Hallen frames Emily Dickinson's informal circulation of verses "in social media forums" as the reason poet presented "a perfect candidate for big-data literary studies in a universe of digital discourse" (73); and Catherine Waitinas notes that manuscripts in *The Whitman Archive* allowed her students "to see literature not only or even at all as the product of a burst of inspiration but, instead, as the result of recurring acts of creation and re-creation" while also "marry[ing] new and old technologies, analyzing big data alongside old-school penmanship" (154).

Similarly, the collection's final sections ("Recover" and "Act") persuasively position digital archives and pedagogy as essential to rethinking and remaking the traditionally white, male canon. Duncan Faherty and Ed White struggled to publish an anthology of overlooked early republican literature before developing the online *Just Teach One* project as a "sustainable recovery project untethered to precarious institutional support or subject to the currently narrow parameters of the academic publishing industry" (108), while Eric Gardner, Nicole Aljoe, and Molly O'Hagan Hardy discuss further expanding its purview to add African American texts in an effort to recover "pieces of American literature and history that have been stolen, dismissed, and abused by a culture that couldn't and wouldn't admit to deep African American engagement with texts" (119). The volume's most powerful contribution, to my mind, is Celeste Tường Vy Sharpe and Timothy Powell's essay on assembling a digital timeline of Haudenosaunee history that more sensitively renders that culture's nonlinear storytelling and cosmology. Simultaneously an urgent critique of "embedded epistemological assumptions" in Eurocentric digital tools and a pedagogical model for "serious engagement with community-based elders, teachers, librarians, and tribal historians" (169), the essay outlines indispensable strategies for decolonizing DH, the canon, and the classroom.

Teaching with Digital Humanities is praxis at its best. Critical self-reflection, decentered teaching philosophies, and an ethics of collaboration shape this volume and the diverse digital projects characterized therein. Not only did all of the collection's contributors read and review each other's draft during its composition, but the majority of the authors also generously shared syllabi and assignments on a companion website (https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/TeachingWithDH/), making the resources available to instructors who, like me, are inspired to reinvigorate their teaching with the provocations of this terrific text.

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