

Running Head: CHALLENGING NEW MEDIA EDUCATION PARADIGMS

Challenging New Media and Civics Education Paradigms:  
A Space for Critical Media and Postcolonial Frameworks

Sarah Paup

University of San Francisco

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

Social media have contributed to an exponential growth of online activity over the past few years, creating new communication paradigms for both people and institutions to consume and share knowledge in unprecedented ways. Youth, in particular, have become actively engaged with websites such as Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter and YouTube. These websites act as “participatory cultures” – places that represent strong, yet informal networks for sharing, expression and engagement (Jenkins, 2006, p. 11). These informal networks provide opportunities for youth in unseen ways, yet they also present challenges to educators and parents in understanding how media are shaping youths’ views, both globally and locally.

Citizen activists and non-profit organizations, on the other hand, have capitalized on the new sharing economy by focusing on advocacy to drive awareness of and engagement with their causes through online social media campaigns. Often these campaigns risk oversimplification of complex issues in their quest to gain mass following and responses, which contributes to the spread of misinformation and the normalization of a particularly ethnocentric worldview. An example most relevant to this problem is the “KONY 2012” viral media campaign; while garnering a record amount of views on social media sites and earning the attention and support of millions of young adults in the West, it diluted a complicated social issue and normalized a Western-centric view of the developing world, particularly in Africa. And yet, marketers and global NGOs often use this campaign as a case study in how to capture young people’s attention and drive awareness at a large scale.

This field project attempts to remedy the existing media literacy and new civics education programs that may use KONY 2012 as a “teachable moment” on international issues, yet fail to reach beyond traditional media literacy programs in identifying the power structures behind these types of events. New media literacy programs, while beneficial in separating fact from fiction, do not routinely apply critical literacy and postcolonial frames to issues of global import like KONY 2012. And, while certain successful civic engagement programs use new media work to empower youth in oppressed communities, they lack the “global citizenship” framework to raise consciousness about global issues while critically examining new media’s role in shaping their perspectives.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The project I propose is to create a critical media and news literacy curriculum aimed at youth and young adults who are actively engaged online in social media spaces. This curriculum will be video- and media-rich, accessible online, and readily available for instructors, parents and students to use and share in different contexts. It is not intended to replace any current curriculum, rather, its purpose serves as a supplemental form of critical learning whereby students actively participate in sharing stories, posting critiques and engaging in dialogue about current events and social causes. The goal of this type of project is to foster “global citizenship” – a frame of mind that is globally aware and ready to take action on issues both at home and abroad – and to develop critical thinking skills by empowering young adults to share their stories and feedback about the worlds in which they thrive - both online and offline. This type of project was

chosen due to the perceived lack in critical media/news literacy programming and tools in secondary and postsecondary educational settings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The predominant theoretical framework of this paper is a concept known as the “White Savior Industrial Complex” (Cole, 2012). This concept, coined by the author and poet Teju Cole, posits that Western media contorts, essentializes and oversimplifies developing or “Third World” countries’ problems in an effort to portray dominance. Western media outlets (books, film and journalism), aid concerts, charity galas, corporations, and increasingly, social media campaigns, continue to propagate the ideological frame that poor countries, as objects, depend on the West in the same ways in which colonized regions once depended upon their colonizers. In this view, drawn from postcolonial theory, European perspectives of the Global South are the representative and normative understanding of the world; moreover, “Third World” problems are frequently viewed from an outside-in lens under the framework of “humanitarianism.” The phrase “White Savior Industrial Complex” takes its name from similar phrases like “White Man’s Burden” or “White in Shining Armor,” terms used to explain how the West has, since colonialism, inserted itself into the affairs of other countries under the guise of humanitarianism or international development.

Globalization and the rise of social media, as a result, have shaped the contours of this narrative with greater impact (and ease) – stories of “the other” are now circulated at warp speed across social networks, purporting “the other” as objects and not subjects, while leaving the “hard work” (and pleasure derived from it) to the West. Some of the earlier examples include the music concerts Live Aid (1985) and Live 8 (2005). These

concerts, whose goals were to “end global poverty,” were spearheaded by white men and amassed a large following of Western youth who benefitted from a star-studded event featuring musical performances and empowering pleas from the likes of Bono and other celebrities. The author Louise Davis (2010) explained how the pleasure of such events was largely one-sided: “While ultimately [Live Aid] offered few new options to those starving in Africa, [it] offered many economic and cultural opportunities for the cities in which the concerts were held, for celebrity organizers and participants, for corporate sponsors, and for concert-goers” (p. 96).

Cole (2012) aptly summarizes the main issue of the White Savior Industrial Complex: “Those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them” (p. 2). In this statement, he aims to deconstruct how charities, NGOs and the West make decisions about the rest of the world without the direct involvement of those who bear the consequences of said decisions. It is precisely this privileged vantage point that the White Savior Industrial Complex avoids being confronted. The author Richard Dyer (2005) elaborates: “The media, politics, education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for whites while claiming – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to speak for humanity” (p. 541). From TOMS shoes to Charity:Water, the presence of this normative Western ideology is apparent in many forms, as both Wayne and Cole suggest. Zhang, Gajjala, & Watkins (2012) add to this frame in identifying a concept they call “digital whiteness”, whereby images, digital texts and media propagate and reinforce white privilege by subjugating “the other” to a position of “voicelessness” and disempowerment. Digital whiteness, they assert, relies on “text in the forms of stories, mission statements and solicitation for donation that implicitly revive White supremacy

inherent in a White standpoint” (p. 210). This form of whiteness was what caused KONY 2012 to be so successful – it placed Western youth as the subjects of its story, enabling them to take action with ease – yet it was also one of the most criticized aspects of the campaign.

The concept of White Savior Industrial Complex is not necessarily new, but the phrasing is attributable to the poet and author Teju Cole as recently as March 2012 (Cole, 2012). Cole composed a series of tweets, and later an opinion article, both posted on *The Atlantic* website, in response to the increasingly widespread use of social media to further Western nonprofit and social causes. He used the social media campaign KONY 2012 as an example of how white privilege, under the guise of “making a difference,” perpetuates postcolonial policies while validating a binary framing of the developing world. Through his own use of social media, the author was able to further the discourse and revive discussions around white privilege in the West. Cole’s tweets, pulled from *The Atlantic*’s website, can be viewed on page 28 in the Appendix, for reference.

### **Significance of the Project**

The ongoing effort to combat misinformation and distill truth in the 24/7 news cycle is daunting, and educators and parents lack the resources and time to be able to effectively implement these strategies. Moreover, they also lack the tools to guide critical discussions of privilege and power within these current methods and pedagogies.

Social media complicates this further, as many youth engage in conversations and practices outside of parents’ and educators’ purview. In addition, global activism campaigns specifically target youth through aggressive marketing and storytelling tactics; by capturing the “zeitgeist” of the movement, these campaigns make it difficult for

parents and educators to join the conversations or guide the discourse. In effect, social media campaigns' "stickiness" and rapidity of scale make challenging the discourse in real time almost impossible. Furthermore, the essentialization that occurs in global charity and humanitarian campaigns makes for an increasingly challenging concept to unpack, especially given that these "global citizen" movements entice young people to "make a difference" through lending their voices to the causes they care about.

This project aims to go beyond both the current new media literacy paradigms that largely focus on digital literacy as a tool to combat misinformation or distinguish fact from fiction and the civic engagement processes that urge youth to become agents of change without negotiating the broader worldviews they bring to the causes they champion. Indeed, this project advocates for a marrying of the two paradigms within the greater themes of critical literacy and postcolonial studies argued in Cole's White Savior theory. By re-centering the frame from one that propels the West to be the agent of change towards a more inclusive model, this way of thinking can guide youth in understanding how their privilege reifies the current discourse around global causes. In turn, the process of changing these paradigms can empower youth to change the worlds in which they live.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Civic engagement:** a spectrum of involvement, both on and offline, in which one can engage to change one's community, nation or world. Civic engagement assumes that the older, "elite" traditions, e.g. writing one's representative or organizing a demonstration, are mixed with newer tactics such as blogging, creating a video online, or sharing an important cause's message with friends. Ethan Zuckerman of MIT's Center

for Civic Media (2013) defines the spectrum of civic engagement under the matrix of “thick versus thin” - high effort versus low effort - “symbolic versus impactful” (no page number).

**Digital media literacy:** defined by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, 2007), is “a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages” (no page number). This paper also assumes “information” to mean news and non-news messages, including videos, advertisements, and stories. This term is interchangeable with: “new(s) media literacy” and “digital and media literacy”.

**Global citizenship:** a theory and practice of being globally minded in an age of interconnectivity through globalization and the rise of the Internet. This field is often explored in Western international/multicultural education settings, and is commonly referred to in the international development nonprofit world (Oxfam, PeaceCorps, etc.).

**Participatory politics:** the tactics of being civically engaged through use of new media. According to Cohen and Kahne (2012), these practices “are focused on expression and are peer based, interactive, and nonhierarchical and they are not guided by deference to elite institutions” (VI). Similar to civic engagement, these practices are geared towards agency, voice and expression within the community.

**Social media:** the online tools and community sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube, which allow for youth engagement and creativity through remixing and sharing of ideas through various content types, including text, images, and video.

**Youth and young people:** sometimes called “Millenials,” this term comprises a generation between the ages of 13 and 25 who are active online through their desktops, laptops and mobile phones and engaged in sharing and viewing online media on a regular basis with their friends and networks.

## **CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

This literature review attempts to understand the current and evolving forms of digital media literacy and civics participation among youth in both informal and formal education spaces, while also examining the issues surrounding information credibility and online activism in social media networks. The prevailing research in academe centers on new media literacies as both a tool to empower youth voices and augment participation in a rapidly changing world, and a weapon to combat misinformation and credibility gaps that persist within these networked spaces. Conversely, few studies have been done around the ways in which social media, in particular through digital storytelling, impact youth perceptions of current global issues (e.g. poverty, war) and propagate normative, ethnocentric worldviews.

In an age of globalization and networked knowledge, youth want to participate and be agents of social change. These new forms of learning, empowerment and civic engagement should also aid youth in questioning the greater political, economic, and social forces that shape our world and create unequal power structures. This review analyzes the literature presented in the two major paradigms – digital and media literacy and civic engagement – with a goal of finding where and how they can incorporate a more inclusive, critical and global perspective.

### **Digital Media Education Paradigms**

#### **Digital Literacy Defined**

The concept of “media literacy” is not particularly new, but adding “digital” significantly alters its scope. While “media” was once limited to TV, print and radio, the

rise in digital and heavily mediated spaces broadens the term to now account for the Internet, specifically social media, websites, advertisements, and rich media (videos, images). In many circles “digital literacy” implies computers and desktop applications, whereas this review focuses on website and social network properties. Hobbs (2010) defines media literacy as “a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society” (p. vii). The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, 2007) employs a similar definition, describing it as “a series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages” (no page number). Many researchers have developed frameworks for creating media literacy programs around the notion that students need a foundation from which to build upon the skills of navigating and creating content online, no matter how broad the media landscape.

### **Protectionism/Empowerment Binary**

The Internet is often described as being both dystopian *and* utopian. On one side, it generates boundless amounts of knowledge and creative possibilities, while the other, darker side is home to harmful speech, acts of violence and prejudice, and propaganda. This binary view mirrors the research on Internet culture as well, whereby authors laud or critique the role the Internet plays in either helping or harming society at large. It also creates the two major paradigms within media literacy studies - protectionism and empowerment – that in turn, shape teachers’, parents’ and policymakers’ views of the Internet. The protectionism paradigm, according to Livingstone, (2010), “fuels society’s anxieties” in attempting to “preserve childhood innocence” (p. 4) through limiting and

gatekeeping youth online activity, instead of allowing youth to come to terms with their own values and expressions through experimentation and making mistakes. It also decontextualizes and oversimplifies the complexity of media's relationship to our everyday lives, thereby inhibiting our ability to transform it, according to Kellner and Share (2007).

Conversely, the empowerment paradigm lauds the democratic powers of the Internet and encourages youth's self-expression, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities through online interactions. Hobbs (2010) claims that the protectionism/empowerment binary is overly simplistic and should instead be viewed as "two sides of the same coin" (p. ix). Thevenin (2012) goes a step further to assert that the binary creates biases *within* media education, as educators tend to emphasize individual attitudes and behaviors rather than "the complexities of media's relationships with social institutions, relations and practices," (p. 62) a topic that will be further explored in another section of this review.

### **"Digital Natives" debate**

In similar fashion to the protectionism/empowerment binary, certain camps in the media elite and academe believe that children born after 1980 are "digital natives," due to their having grown up during the age of computers, smart phones, and on-demand technology. Flanagin and Metzger (2010) claim researchers continue to view youth through this simplistic lens, "focusing for example on the popular generation gap caricature, where youth are portrayed as either technologically adept compared to adults or completely useless" (p. 4).

The proponents of this concept believe that digital natives possess unique skills that allow them to get online, navigate and create on the web faster and easier than those born before technology use was inextricably linked to everyday living. As Livingstone (2010) points out, those researching the field “must be wary of prematurely celebrating youthful digital literacies,” (p. 4) since little evidence suggests that youth fully comprehend the larger implications of their online use, or that they grasp the contexts of their online experiences without added support or guidance. Despite this need for support, more and more products are being marketed under the belief that digital natives possess these fundamental properties and skills, and the media has capitalized on this trend by intertwining this belief within the already heavily mediated spaces that youth inhabit.

The main concern within the “digital natives” concept is that it assumes that youth are also digitally *literate*, which is not often the case. Researchers like Livingstone (2010) have concluded that the “digital native” label is grossly inaccurate in portraying youth as savvy and knowledgeable consumers and producers of media online. It confuses usage with conscious consumption, suggests engagement follows carefully weighed thought, and can perpetuate the normative belief that youth are equal online contributors and agents within their own social spheres.

### **Critical and Political Frameworks**

Reports on new media education often emphasize digital citizenship and transformative experiences associated with online participation and engagement. Much of the literature around the topic, however, omits or subverts the political and critical nature of media education. The “critical” part of digital media literacy is in many works cited as a subcategory of the overall approach to digital literacy skills, both in and outside of the

classroom. Yet as Burnett and Merchant (2011) propose, it should be front and center as “an act of resistance or at least an inoculation against media domination” (p. 44). Adding the “critical” element touches on a nerve, however, especially when the critique is centered around popular culture. Burnett and Merchant (2011) claim that a balancing act between building learner engagement and potential undermining of pleasures associated with pop culture is required when approaching critical media activities in the classroom. Since pop culture artifacts (film, movies, TV, games, celebrity gossip) inherently aim to garner pleasure from their consumption, the act of critiquing them in a wholly objective manner can imply to students that “what they enjoy is actually flawed or in some ways simply wrong” (p. 44). By further institutionalizing this form of critical media, educators risk alienating students from the material and miss the chance to raise consciousness around these contested topics.

Inherent in many of the defined or agreed-upon core principles of education is the concept of “democratic citizenship.” NAMLE (2007) states in principle #4 of Core Media Literacy Practices that its goal is to “develop informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society” (no page number). Yet in practice, Thevenin (2012) claims that new media education suffers from an “apolitical” stance in its curriculum. The protectionist approach puts students as passive receptors to (mostly mass) media messaging, and an apolitical curriculum often depicts media as antagonistic and negative. With this apolitical stance, most media literacy education practices focus on analyzing themes that are apparent and visible – the “tip of the iceberg” – instead of what lies beneath the normative structures of power and control, according to Kellner and Share (2007, p. 8).

Education policymakers balk at exploring these complexities for “fear that explicitly political education may alienate potential sponsors, practitioners, and participants with diverse political orientations” (Thevenin, 2012, p. 65). In order to pursue education as a practice of freedom - emphasizing social justice, democracy and empowerment theories - a stronger application of critical and political curricula is crucial. Kellner and Share (2007) argue for a more holistic approach that incorporates cultural studies such as gender, ethnic studies, politics and sociology, topics aimed to re-align the democratic underpinnings of education as a daily practice. In one of their examples, a UCLA professor developed a project for students to create counterhegemonic movies and websites as alternatives to mainstream media. In this model, students used a critical media framework to balance theory and practice while directly exploring issues surrounding the “politics of representation” (p. 10).

### **Youth Perspectives**

An important yet slow growing area of digital media literacy research is focused on gaining youth perspectives on what, how, and why they consume and produce information online. As Flanagin and Metzger (2010) discovered during their research, 97% of kids reported going online by the time of eighth grade, and yet extremely little research has been produced on how pre-college aged youth interact online. This gap suggests that future research is needed to accurately and effectively reflect the youth online experience relating to new media literacy development.

Students in Flanagin and Metzger’s (2010) study tended to report that as they engage more and more online they “develop a healthy sense of skepticism and concern about the believability” of the information available to them (p. 63). This finding,

however, does not necessarily indicate whether or not youth fully understand the social, historical and political contexts behind what they consume online. In fact, Flanagin and Metzger point out that youth often use “heuristic” (gut feeling) rather than “analytic” factors when assessing information credibility online, which suggests that youth need more guidance and support in developing critical thinking skills while online (p. 64).

When constructing digital media literacy programs, it is also necessary to analyze the underlying dispositions that trigger youth online activity. Flores and James (2012) compiled youth surveys to delineate their moral, ethical and individualistic “ways of thinking” (p. 4) during their time online. While many demonstrated the capacity for ethical thinking (such as considering whether or not to download illegal games to their computer), “perspective-taking,” or taking the perspective of different stakeholders in their online experience, was the most challenging obstacle in those they had surveyed (p. 14). This result may also tie into the fact that many youth continue to engage online with like-minded peers and communities – rather than new or diverse circles – which, according to Kahne et al. (2011) potentially amplifies the “echo chamber” that may result from overly filtering or narrowing one’s online experience (p. 402).

### **Civics Engagement Paradigms**

#### **Participatory Politics**

In traditional models of civic engagement, created in top-down administrative fashion and disseminated through heavily structured spaces such as the classroom, youth are encouraged to participate within a limited number of pathways. The traditional paradigm of “engaged youth,” according to Bennett (2000), assumes a certain normative political theory that measures civic participation through long-held institutions such as

voting, registering for a political party, and other conventional government-centric activities. According to Bennett, this paradigm undermines the positive trends that reveal youth participation patterns that fall outside of traditional modes of engagement and into more emerging forms like online forums and social media. Moreover, youth attitudes are evolving toward a “social movement citizenship” paradigm, whereby youth emphasize the importance of participating in activities related to human rights, helping others, and protecting the environment (p. 8).

These new signs of engagement are what educators and policymakers struggle to define and grasp in a quickly changing online media landscape. Coupled with the loss of classic civics education programs within schools, it presents a challenge to those seeking to understand just how and why youth “get involved” with the world around them – both locally and globally. Jenkins (2006) conceptualized the emerging use of social media in engaging youth around civic causes with his ecological framing of “participatory cultures” (p. 11). Social media, by design, are inherently participatory, and Jenkins argues that schools should encourage healthy participation within these spheres, not simply as an add-on to existing curriculum, but rather as an introduction to a paradigm shift, given how pervasive and integrated technology is within youths’ daily lives. In addition, the organic, supportive and networked frame of participatory cultures – such as gaming and social media sites, “fandom” and pop culture communities – allow for new forms of expression, appropriation and engagement than ever before.

Similarly, Kahne and Cohen (2012) assert that these forms of participatory political practices “are focused on expression and are peer based, interactive, and nonhierarchical and they are not guided by deference to elite institutions” (p. vi).

“Conventional citizenship” is on its way out, as new forms of engagement are ushered in at a rapidly increasing pace (Bennett, 2000, p.8). In many ways, these informal structures serve as anathema to the apolitical media education practices found inside the classroom or contained within school walls, since they represent a movement to resist or subvert the classic systems that dictate how, why and where democracy comes to life.

### **Global Citizenship Education**

Media representations, at a very basic level, facilitate and shape our understanding of the world and our place within it. Under the lens of globalization, which implies the opening of previously closed barriers and the free flow of trade, goods, people, and information, we now experience a more “fluid” understanding of what it means to be a “global citizen,” according to Zahabouin et al (2013), and media play a core role in defining it. In this view, global citizenship is a twofold process: one becomes globally minded and conscious of worldwide issues including human rights, labor, and the environment, while simultaneously becoming empowered to make a difference and solve these greater problems. It is a moral perspective, one that incorporates the cosmopolitan view that humans are progressive and capable of attaining common, singular goals such as world peace, environmental conservation, and the end of poverty. Global citizenship also takes into account the role of agency, inasmuch that our local actions can have global consequences, and vice-versa. It is precisely within this umbrella of agency that we are empowered to take action in an interdependent world. The rise of media allows for such perspective taking, in that we can now see “how the other half lives” without having to experience it in the flesh: film, television, advertising, and global social media campaigns do the work of discovering these issues on our behalf.

Global citizenship education dovetails somewhat on the efforts of international NGOs and multilateral organizations to generate awareness for the worldly issues that are currently at stake, and is often incorporated under the realm of “multicultural” education within school settings. Aside from consciousness-raising, these programs focus on skill and attitude development to equip students with the tools to go out and “make a difference” and be agents of change. Oxfam UK, according to Zahoubian et al. (2013), developed its own global citizenship curriculum in a guidebook for schools, which focuses on issues of global governance, social justice and our “rights” as citizens. This is but one example of how NGOs and other organizations are utilizing a form of civic engagement in and outside of the classroom to create more “global citizens”.

### **Digital Activism**

Digital activism is a tool through which students can get involved and “make a difference” in the lives of others and in their own communities. It is tethered to concepts of global citizenship and participatory politics and is often symbolically tied to popular culture as well, with the rise of “fandom” activism, such as the Harry Potter Alliance or the movie *Avatar*, according to Brough and Shresthova (2012). The goals of digital activism are largely about resistance, challenging notions of power and politics, and mobilizing a large critical mass around a particular issue. Traditionally, these signs of involvement in social movements require physical presence – a protest, a sit-in, or a march. The increasing role of the Internet in daily life, however, upends that assumption – now, anyone with a website or a video can mobilize millions of online users to get involved and lend their voices. Social media complicate this further inasmuch being “active” is drastically different than in previous generations; it no longer requires a

physical presence to take action, more symbolic representations – a click or a “like” – are the new signifiers for one’s agency. Additionally, one need not declare one’s belonging to a particular party, group or network in order to participate. These vast and overlapping “content worlds”, however, make it difficult to understand whether one is participating in “authentic” activism or just going along with what is popular during that moment in time (p. 13).

As a result of the changing nature of digital activism – its fluid membership, varying goals and levels of participation – evaluating the sustainability of it makes for a difficult challenge to educators and researchers, according to Brough and Shresthova (2012). The authors do ponder the implications of such forms of activism, however. For example, while land-rights activists in Palestine can film and disseminate a video showing them dressed as indigenous Na’vi characters to protest the occupation, what message does that convey about the role of the movie *Avatar* in perpetuating neocolonial stereotypes? Brough and Shresthova implicate the role of new media storytelling in propagating hegemonic structures, but do not continue the critique in their cited work, calling instead for future research on the topic.

### **Conclusion**

The cited and included works frame the concept of new media literacy education from an institutionalized perspective while simultaneously providing examples of civic engagement and informal “participatory cultures” from a youth perspective. While many researchers in this review are descriptive – aiming to accurately portray youth in their lived online spaces, a few critique the normalization of terms such as “digital natives” or the employment of literacy methods centered around “protectionist” paradigms. Many

were able to cite examples of new forms of civics engagement and youth empowerment through “participatory cultures” and online activism, trends that correlate strongly to the increasingly widespread adoption of new media tools in and outside the home and school walls.

What the empirical research failed to problematize, however, were the ways in which youth are subjected to heavily mediated forms of systemic power structures related to globalization, hegemony and inequality. Despite the fact that youth, in one study, may have been able to identify ethical dilemmas, or in another, could evaluate the credibility of certain information sources, there were no attempts to have youth critically examine or problematize the political, social and economic forces that shape their online perspectives of global issues. Some of the more critical themes explored by Thevenin, Livingstone, and Kellner and Shaw brought this issue to bear in a larger context; however, recent examples of utilizing critical media theory in a school context, pertinent to postcolonial issues, were lacking.

What continued research could add to this topic is multifold: to not only layer in the civic engagement framework relative to global citizenship education but also to incorporate the international and postcolonial theoretical frame that complicates the existing paradigms surrounding new media education. Because of the rapid pace of new media development and digital storytelling, many educators and parents are left to create teachable moments post fact: in the case of KONY 2012 and other movements, these examples are still widely undocumented or adopted into the institutional settings that desperately need them.

It is my opinion that we cannot separate media literacy from engagement. In order to understand how movements can change and shape worldviews, subvert authority or garner 100 million views on YouTube, we need to deconstruct who are behind these campaigns, why they are present, and what their goals are. Media literacy should go beyond the basic skills required to point out a hoax website or discover truth kernels in fiction; it should also be about confronting privilege and power structures. Further research could propose how we can move beyond the empowerment/protectionist binary and bring in critical media to current education programs, as a few of the cited authors suggested. These programs can and should empower youth to become global citizens without assuming the gaze of postcolonial privilege, where “changing the world” starts and ends with a click of a button. Instead, they can become digital and global citizens that are capable of asking difficult questions, problematizing the status quo, and allowing for other voices to be heard while still letting their own stories shine.

### **CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Description of the Project**

The project I propose is to create a critical media and news literacy curriculum aimed at young adults who are actively engaged online in social media spaces. This curriculum will be video- and media-rich, accessible online, and readily available for instructors, parents and students to use and share in different contexts. It is not intended to replace any current curriculum; rather, its purpose serves as a supplemental form of critical learning whereby students actively participate in sharing stories, posting critiques and engaging in dialogue about current events and social causes. The goal of this type of project is to foster “global citizenship” and develop critical thinking skills by empowering young adults to share their stories and feedback about the worlds in which they thrive - both online and offline. This type of project was chosen due to the perceived lack in critical media/news literacy programming and tools in secondary and postsecondary educational settings.

#### **Development of the Project**

This project came to being as a result of a deeper examination of the “White Savior Industrial Complex” phenomenon that Teju Cole (2012) put forth last year. While writing a literature review for a previous class around this idea, I came to notice that little has been written around the “technological gaze” of privilege in internet spheres, particularly around global citizenship movements aimed and youth in the West. After more research, I uncovered that much of new media education discourse teaches a transactional approach to being “media savvy,” whereby a person should investigate a hoax email or shared story on Facebook the same way that they fact-check a paper: once

and move on. The idea that we should instead aim to view the world in systems and structures, drawing from critical and poststructural theories, was missing throughout my research and in the observed conversations happening in digital learning communities, including academic conferences. It is from this springboard I am seeking to create a project that will fill the gaps between the existing new media and civics education paradigms so that they may incorporate more of these types of inclusive practices both in and outside of the classroom.

The project will be completed in three stages. The first stage will involve due diligence and outreach. I will continue to explore current curricula or existing projects (including websites) within the spheres of new media literacy, civic engagement, global citizenship and critical theory practices. Alongside this investigation, I will perform outreach to educators within the digital media and learning community. Outreach will be conducted primarily through social media and online communities (LinkedIn, HASTAC.org, DMLhub.net) in the spirit of transparency and networked learning. Stage one is to be completed by June 2013.

The second stage will consist of content creation. Armed with resources and support from the due diligence stage, I will begin to create or amass relevant content and ideas within the framework that I've developed. This stage will overlap with other stages, as content development can be an ongoing, iterative process. Stage two should be completed by August 2013.

The third stage will focus on editing and refining content. I will solicit feedback related to the content that has been produced via surveys and emails. By this time, the content will be available online in a website or web-page format. Ultimately, the project's

completion date hinges on the efficacy and timeliness of this stage. My goal is to have this completed by December 2013.

### **The Project**

To be developed at a later date.

## REFERENCES

- Bennett, W. (2008). Changing citizenship in a digital age. *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. 1-24.
- Brough, M. & Shresthova, S. (2012). Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10(0), 1-28.
- Burnett, C., & Merchant, G. (2011). Is there a space for critical literacy in the context of social media? *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(1), 41-57.
- Cohen, C., & Kahne, J. (2012). Participatory politics: New media and youth political action. *MacArthur Research Network on Youth & Participation Politics*. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from [http://dmlcentral.net/sites/dmlcentral/files/resource\\_files/ypp\\_survey\\_body\\_cover.pdf](http://dmlcentral.net/sites/dmlcentral/files/resource_files/ypp_survey_body_cover.pdf)
- Cole, T. (2012). *The White Savior Industrial Complex*. Retrieved April 1, 2012, from The Atlantic Monthly: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/1>
- Davis, H. L. (2010). Feeding the world a line?: Celebrity activism and ethical consumer practices from Live Aid to Product Red. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 9(3), 89-118.
- Dyer, R. (1999). The matter of whiteness. *Theories of Race & Racism*, 539-548.
- Flanagin, A., & Metzger, M. (2010). Kids and credibility: an empirical examination of youth, digital media use, and information credibility. *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Retrieved March 9, 2013, from <http://dmlcentral.net/resources/4110>
- Flores, A & James, C. (2012). Morality and ethics behind the screen: Young people's perspectives on digital life. *New Media Society*, 0(0), 1-19.
- Hobbs, R. (2010). New media literacy - a plan of action. [White Paper]. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute. Retrieved March 9, 2013, from [http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Digital\\_and\\_Media\\_Literacy\\_A\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action.pdf](http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Digital_and_Media_Literacy_A_Plan_of_Action.pdf)
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Chicago, IL: The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
- Kahne, J., Middagh, E., Lee, N., & Feezell, J. (2011). Youth online activity and exposure

to diverse perspectives. *New Media & Society*, 14(3), 492-512.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy and the reconstruction of education. In Macedo, D., & Steinberg, S.R. (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Livingstone, S. (2010). Digital learning and participation among youth: Critical reflections on future research priorities. *International Journal of Learning and Media*, 2(2-3), 1-13.

Thevenin, B. (2012). The re-politicization of media literacy education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4(1), 61-69.

National Association for Media Literacy Education. (2007, November). Core principles of media literacy education in the United States. Retrieved March 9, 2013, from <http://namle.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CorePrinciples.pdf>.

Zahabioun, S., Yousefy, A., Yarmohammadian, M., & Keshtiaray, N. (2013). Global citizenship education and its implication for curriculum goals at the age of globalization. *International Education Studies*, 6(1), 195-206.

Zuckerman, E. (2013). Beyond the crisis in civics. [Keynote Address]. *DML 2013 Conference*. Retrieved March 29, 2013, from <http://dml2013.dmlhub.net/content/videos-day-1-keynote-ignite-talks>

Zhang, Y., Gajjala, R., & Watkins, S. (2012). Home of hope: Voicings, whiteness, and the technological gaze. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(3), 202-221.

## APPENDIX

“The White Savior Industrial Complex” explained via Twitter – Cole, 2012)

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

1- From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

---

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

2- The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

---

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

3- The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

---

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

4- This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people and Oprah.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

5- The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

---

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

6- Feverish worry over that awful African warlord. But close to 1.5 million Iraqis died from an American war of choice. Worry about that.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)

---

 **Teju Cole**  
@tejucole [Follow](#)

7- I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.

8 Mar 12 [← Reply](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [★ Favorite](#)