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The Potentiality of a Digital Revolution: Alienated Activists and the Surveillance State (abstract)

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 1-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Media and the Digital Age

Presenter: Jennifer Grubbs

Title: The Potentiality of a Digital Revolution: Alienated Activists and the Surveillance State

Abstract: The following paper will examine the ways in which digital media is used by both activists engaged in struggles of inequity as well as the State. Specifically, the paper focuses on the use of digital media in the antiracist organizing following the murders of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York. Activists relied on digital media to share information, narratives, as well as create networks for mobilization. The State relied on digital media to provide counter-narratives and promulgate a fear-based rhetoric depicting activists as “looters.”

This paper emphasizes the potentiality of power in utilizing digital media as a way to challenge human rights violations in the U.S. Through an Athusserian lens; this analysis interrogates the process of subject formation within the digitized terrain in which citizenship is made possible through the performance of patriotism and dissent *through* digital media. Ultimately, human rights advocates must ask themselves if and how violent power can be recapitulated through digital democracies or if the revolution, ultimately, will not be tweeted.

Keywords: Activism, #Blacklivesmatter, Resistance, Digital Democracy, Antiracism

Biography: Jennifer Grubbs is a Doctoral Candidate at American University, Washington, D.C. in Anthropology, specializing in Race, Gender, and Social Justice. Jennifer is an adjunct instructor in the department of Communication at the University of Cincinnati. Her courses focus on issues of structural violence and the social construction of privilege through institutions such as gender, race, sexuality, ability, species, and class. Jennifer also teaches a social movement course that focuses on the use of rhetoric in both non-State resistance and the State’s systematic use of control to both silence and discourage dissent. Her research focuses on the ways in which leftist social movements engage in direct action to challenge structures of violence, and has a particular focus on the effective use of illegal property destruction.