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## Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media

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## In Review: Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media

Everett, Anna (Ed.) (2008). *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. 197 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-55067-3. \$16.00. Open access electronic versions of all the books in this series are available at <http://mitpress.mit.edu>.

The MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning is an ambitious publishing project that claims that youth “immersed in new digital tools and networks are engaged in an unprecedented exploration of language, games, social interaction, problem solving, and self-directed activity that leads to diverse forms of learning.” What is more, these new forms of learning affect expression, creativity, and knowledge production, as well as youth’s “ability to learn, exercise judgment, and think systematically.”

A recent book in the MacArthur series, *Learning race and ethnicity* asks, “[H]ow are race and ethnicity presented, represented, known, and understood generally in digital media interactions and transactions, such as in gameplay,... friendship/social networks, blogs, grassroots community organizing,... and so forth?” Editor Everett intends each of the eight essays to “intervene in this crucial issue outside of the usual or familiar binary rhetorics of information have and have-nots, technophiles and technophobes, information rich and poor, etc., and certainly beyond the problematics of the race- and class-based digital divide rhetoric of limits....”

To this end, Everett, Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has assembled pieces that range broadly from hip hop distribution to online gaming to healthcare information. This wide variety in topics makes the volume feel slightly thin at times. In ideal circumstances, each topic warrants its own volume, which could make for deeper investigations and collate common findings.

In approach, the book’s chapters often look at how digital media can (and do) empower or work against minority youth. Each piece presents specific case studies and data to make broader, generalized claims. Most chapters include directions for “scholars..., technology workers, grass-roots activists, technology entrepreneurs, and others” to pursue in the future. For example, Douglas Thomas’s piece investigates the online battle game *Diablo II*, dissects nationalistic/racist user communities that have sprung up in response to Korean players, and advises scholars to “pay careful attention not only to representations of race and ethnicity as they appear on the surface,

but also to emergent cultures that spawn around these images and representations.”

The strongest chapters, if read with a keen eye, offer librarians footholds for action. For instance, many of these studies strongly imply the need for better information literacy among youth. It is imperative in the battle against racism that young people be able to evaluate a website and determine whether it presents factual information or makes racist claims. It is also essential that youth be exposed to the creative (rather than passive) power of digital media and have access to the tools needed for self-expression. And to paraphrase another underlying thread in this book, it is critical that we understand the needs and the perspectives of unique, local, and ethnic communities.

Librarians have built this house already. Yet libraries and librarians are nowhere to be found in this book (unless we are categorized with “technology workers”). Where the authors call for “sustainable learning opportunities for using digital media technologies,” they fail to note already well-established examples of community-based library programs in computer skills and information literacy around the country. The lacuna of “the library” in this volume suggests that there is great untapped potential in collaborative approaches to some of the issues raised here. Still, librarians serving children and young adults will certainly benefit from harvesting the data and conclusions gathered in this volume and putting that information to work, in their philosophies and in their libraries.

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