Afro-futurism: 1900 to 3009 Fall 2024

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| Professor Jennifer Bajorek | Wed 9 am – 11:50 am |
| [jbajorek@hampshire.edu](mailto:jbajorek@hampshire.edu) |  |

**READING AND LOOKING QUESTIONS**

**W.E.B. DU BOIS, *The Georgia Negro: A Social Study* (set 1) and *A Series of Statistical Charts Illustrating the Condition of the Descendants of Former African Slaves Now Resident in the United States of America*** **(set 2) (1900)**

*Getting started…*

1. Spend as much time as you need to look closely at all 63 posters (both sets). Perhaps this will be an hour per set (roughly 2 mins. per poster). Perhaps it will be longer. Make an effort to engage with the images/design elements of the posters (and not only the text). Not all posters will speak to you equally, and you should feel free to follow your own impulses. Write down some questions that arise for you as you engage with this material for the first time. Be prepared to share 1-2 of these questions in class.

1b. If you could ask W.E.B. Du Bois a question about the work that he and his team did to create these posters, or about the posters themselves, what would it be?

1c. If you could ask a visitor to the 1900 Paris Exposition – let’s imagine this person is *not* a US citizen – a question about their impression of the posters, what would it be?

1. Was the Black proportion of the US population (as a proportion of the total US population) larger or smaller under slavery than in the post-emancipation period? Which poster or posters give the relevant info. here? What are some conclusions we can draw from this?
2. Find the poster titled “Negro Population in the United States Compared with the Total Population of Other Countries” (set 2). What is interesting, and potentially provocative, about the way these data are presented?
3. What US state had the largest Black population in 1900? (You may be able to derive this information from the posters, or you may need to read Battle-Baptiste’s and Rusert’s “Introduction” to get this info.)

*Moving into the readings…*

1. Notice that Battle-Baptiste and Rusert start their “Introduction” by discussing Du Bois’s sci-fi writing/speculative fiction, rather than his scholarly writing or his scientific career. What is interesting about this?
2. On p. 8 of their “Introduction,” Battle-Baptiste and Rusert give a basic definition of “data visualization.” Find it, note it/write it down, be prepared to share it.

6b. According to this definition, is the knowledge that emerges from or that is generated by a certain data set something fixed or static? Or do data have the capacity to give rise to new knowledge in the context of future interpretation or imaginative practice?

1. What kinds of sources did Du Bois and his team draw on in making the posters? (Where did they get the data?)
2. True or False. The “American Negro Exhibit,” which was part of a larger exhibition representing the US in the 1900 Paris Exposition, included an on-site collection of over 250 publications by African Americans dating from before (or up to) the year 1900.

8b. How many publications by African American authors written and published before (or in) the year 1900 have you read? (List those you know/can remember.)

1. On p. 19 of their “Introduction,” Battle-Baptiste and Rusert note that, despite the inclusion of pathbreaking materials by Black thinkers/artists/scientists in the 1900 Paris Exposition, “the broader logic of the Exposition…was still an imperial one.” What do they mean?
2. In her essay about Du Bois’s posters, Mabel O. Wilson underscores that the posters both “rendered a geographic history of the African slave trade and mapped present conditions in Georgia” and “sutured the two together” (43). Why is this important for her? Whose ideas about Africans’ being “unhistorical” and “incapable of the development of any culture” does she Du Bois and his posters as refuting?

Go the extra mile and know something about the thinker/maker and his context:

--Where was W.E.B. Du Bois born?

--Where did he die? In what year?

--Where did he receive his college degrees? (List the institutions at which he obtained his Bachelor’s degree and his doctorate/PhD.)

--True or False. When he received his PhD, he was the first Black/African American to receive a doctorate from the degree-granting institution.

--Of what well-known national civil rights organization was Du Bois a co-founder (in 1909)?

--Where are his papers currently housed?