
About the Cover



Aaron Palomides of Buckminster.
Source: *Suburban Knights: A Return to the Middle Ages* (2010). © E.F. Kitchen.

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2015) 6, 1–2. doi:10.1057/pmed.2015.6

The cover image has the potential to unsettle its viewer in ways that the essays in this issue seek to address. The viewer finds that her position in modernity, usually protagonistic, assumed, and unassailed, becomes unstable. She asks: Is this an evil knight because he is black? Is this the kind of blackness that signals antagonism? Assumptions about good and evil are superseded by even more pressing concerns about time: If this is not the kind of blackness that signals a knight's evil, is it because in medieval literature, art and warfare, a knight's blackness inheres in his armor, not his skin? Are questions of blackness in response to the image so decidedly modern, so anachronistic, that they cease to be useful lines of inquiry? Concerns about temporality quickly give way to questions about the status of race in the construction of time: Weren't the European Middle Ages homogenously white, or very close to it, anyway? Is this image not that of a medieval black knight at all, but rather that of a *modern* notion of a medieval black knight – a notion that is ultimately erroneous? Or is it that this is not a *black knight* but instead a *knight who happens to be black*? Is this knight the result of late twentieth-century multi-culturalism and color-blind casting, in which a body of any color can appear in any role?

The photograph is of Aaron Palomides of Buckminster, a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, a group devoted to re-enacting medieval activities, including battle. By engaging these questions, the image disturbs the humdrum of racial time. It unsettles the notion that we know what

blackness means – that, in the context of historical racism, blacks are exclusively modern and cannot lay claim to a glorious and racially pure Middle Ages, and further, that in the context of the American and global justice systems, black skin denotes a violent and criminal character. It unsettles, too, opposing perspectives on what blackness means – that, in the context of the Civil Rights movement, it means the triumphant yet continual overcoming of blackness’s unfair devaluation, or that, in the context of today’s ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, it means the survivalist necessity of overcoming the injustices perpetrated by a violent and racist legal system. The image unsettles the notion that the answer to racism is color blindness. The image unsettles the notion that there is an answer.

When Aaron Palomides confronts you with his sidelong gaze, he knows he is a black knight. And he knows that he confronts you with a whirl of significations. Others in Kitchen’s book state that they engage in re-enactments of medieval battle in order to get away from the stresses of their daily lives, to escape their pasts, to become someone different from their everyday selves yet truer to their real, innermost selves. Perhaps when Aaron Palomides dons his medieval armor and stares into the lens of a modern camera, disturbing race and time, he does so in order to get away from the very kinds of questions his image engenders. Or at least to get away from the constraining belief that these disturbing questions’ only value is in their answers. By confronting us with his image, he challenges us to join him and to rest in the whirl of the disturbance.

Cord J. Whitaker
Department of English,
Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA