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Author

Erinn, Wong

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Undergraduate

Digital Blackface: How 21st Century Internet Language Reinforces Racism

I. Introduction

In February 2019, an image of a man in blackface standing alongside another person in a Ku Klux Klan costume surfaced from Democratic Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's medical school yearbook page taken in 1984 (see Appendix A). While many prominent Democrats and Republicans called for his resignation, he refused to resign and denied that he was the person in the photo, despite previously admitting darkening his face to dress up as Michael Jackson for a dance contest in San Antonio. Shortly after this controversy, a 2005 photograph of Florida Secretary of State Michael Ertel emerged that showed him wearing blackface, red lipstick, a New Orleans Saints bandana, and a shirt that said "Katrina Victim." Within that week, Ertel acknowledged his racist behavior and submitted his resignation (Brice-Saddler, Contrera, and Brown). These incidents are unfortunately not uncommon, and they call into question the kinds of values that America's leaders champion and why society continues to reward that kind of racist criminal behavior by electing these representatives to office. The national spotlight on these politicians participating in blackface reveals an ugly truth – historical blackface has never truly ended, and Americans have yet to actively confront their racist past to this day. In fact, minstrel blackface has emerged into even more subtle forms of racism that are now glorified all over the Internet.

Reaction GIFs, Internet memes, and keyboard stickers have become a part of the social experience of 21st-century Internet culture; however, a social dilemma exists because at the center of all these images used to share emotions and feelings of relatability over social media and text messages, the subjects are almost overwhelmingly black. Sa'iyda Shabazz, a writer for a popular online blog called *Scary Mommy*, writes "[I]t is hard to wade into the comment section

of a social media thread without seeing some of the same GIFs over and over. The eyeroll of *Real Housewives*' star NeNe Leakes somehow becomes the symbol for millions of white women who just can't even." Thus, even a cursory glance on social media and other Internet sites demonstrates that often subjects are black, mocked, and over used. "Digital blackface," a term popularized by feminist writer and University of Chicago doctoral candidate, Lauren Michele Jackson, is the "practice of white and non-Black people making anonymous claims to a Black identity through contemporary technological mediums" (*The Awl*). The term originated from American journalist Adam Clayton Powell III, who in 1999 coined the term "high-tech blackface" to refer to the racial stereotyping of black characters in computer games (Marriott). These racial stereotypes are now captured by GIFs and memes that feature black celebrities like NeNe Leakes, Oprah Winfrey, Tyra Banks, Mariah Carey, "Sweet Brown" Wilkins, NBA players, and other black people, which have dominated online feeds and have become normalized as users' default source of expressing emotion (see Appendix B). The fact that most of these subjects in reaction GIFs and memes are black is not a coincidence because media producers create these digital icons that partake in exporting black bodies, art, and culture into mass culture.

Alex Chung, the founder and CEO of *Giphy*, an online GIF database with over 300 million users, has acknowledged that the types of GIFs people use from their database prove how problematic digital blackface has been as a trend, and his company has since modified their filters to ensure that they offering GIFs that are not perpetuating racist messages (Harris). Furthermore, the circulation of blackface throughout history illustrates how blackface contains memetic qualities that allow images of black people to be commodified for mass entertainment, and thus normalize anti-blackness in Hollywood and mainstream media, imagery, and cultures.

Both media consumers and producers must therefore be cognizant of how digital blackface preserves legacies of racism, and must recognize the impact they have in changing the racial formations and attitudes developed in American society.

Digital blackface is problematic to society because it is a repackaged form of minstrel blackface that culturally appropriates the language and expressions of black people for entertainment, while dismissing the severity of everyday instances of racism black people encounter, such as police brutality, job discrimination, and educational inequity. To understand how digital blackface perpetuates legacies of racism and to change this type of problematic Internet culture, media consumers and producers must be conscious of its origins from 19th and 20th century minstrel blackface; its evolution into different forms of media across the digital sphere, such as GIFs, memes, and stickers; and the racial implications it has within and beyond Internet language and culture.

II. Minstrel Blackface

Digital blackface is historically rooted in racist blackface minstrel performances from the 19th century, and the adaptability of blackface by consumers has contributed to its longevity in society. In its malleability, early blackface has much in common with today's memes that spread its toxicity because both enable recombination so readily (Shifman 4; Phillips and Milner 31). When mixed and then remixed, blackface and the memesphere ignite and spread racism as gasoline tossed on flames spreads destructive fires. What Shifman refers to as the "pervasiveness of Internet memes" (23) is an incontrovertible fact that we as an increasingly diverse society must understand better since the "hypermemonic nature of contemporary culture" (24) creates invisible bonds and "a sense of membership in a privileged" (24) group that can quickly devolve into us versus them.

As a theatrical tradition from the 19th century, minstrel blackface involved non-black performers “blackening” themselves up with makeup, costumes, and behaviors, to portray blacks as caricatures. These mocking representations reinforced the idea that African Americans were inferior, in a society that already systematically oppressed and dehumanized black people because of the slavery culture that dominated the United States, especially in the South. In fact, blacks could not legally vote until the 15th Amendment was passed in 1870, and even then, they were met with poll taxes, literacy tests, imitation, and outright violence that prevented them from fully exercising their rights; these discriminatory practices at the state and local levels were not officially outlawed until almost a century later with the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (*History.com*). The inferiority towards blacks that came along with blackface in mainstream entertainment helped maintain these systems of oppression. According to former race, law, and politics reporter Jenee Desmond Harris, blackface caricatures, such as Mammy, Uncle Tom, Buck, and Jezebel, gave birth to cartoonish, degrading stereotypes seen in Vaudeville shows, Broadway, and minstrel performances that portrayed blacks as subordinate, slow, dumb, carefree, hypersexual, and violent (*Vox*).

Thus, the stereotypes society has developed about black people, such as the trope of a “lazy black mother” or a “predatory black male,” directly evolved from minstrel blackface in early American entertainment, which projected racist imagery and inferior attitudes towards black people. According to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), these performances were the first time the nation had explicitly developed stereotypes about an entire racial identity. As former Igbo chieftain and novelist Chinua Achebe describes this pernicious influence in an interview with *Failure Magazine*: “[T]he whole idea of a stereotype is to simplify,” and contemporary novelist Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie echoes this idea in a 2009 TED Talk viewed nearly 18,000,000 times, “The Danger of a Single Story,” reminding that a single story “robs people of dignity.” These stereotypes used in minstrel performances were a way for white Americans to distinctly classify whiteness across social, political, and economic lines. In fact, criminal justice and race reporter for the *Guardian*, Jamiles Lartey, notes that poor and uneducated working-class whites, such as the Irish, who felt socially excluded from the Anglo elites, used blackface as a way of gaining social acceptance – that, they too, were white, desirable, and civilized above all else – which was completely opposite to what blackness meant in white society. In this regard, blackface has long been used as a tool to unify and promote white supremacy and also to celebrate a symbol of white power and white American patriotism.

Since blackface minstrelsy, blackface gained traction in the 20th century as it resurfaced in films, radio, and music recordings, and according to scholar Kevin Byrne, who has explored how blackface objectifies racism, “the adaptability of the blackface mask” to new forms of media comes from “objectifying and reifying regressive thought” that is based on the premise that blackface is a closed, tautological system (666). Byrne explains that in the tautology of blackface, technology normalizes blackface in intense, repetitive imagery and messaging to consumers, like those in advertising and propaganda. This system perpetuates the idea that “black people act that way because black people act that way,” further equating blackness to a “thingness” that can be categorized and reproduced into a mass cultural commodity (666).

Aspects of mass culture introduce new horrifying possibilities. Critics and German philosophers of the Frankfurt school, Thomas Adorno and Max Horkheimer, view mass culture as a marketplace where media producers operate with the sole intention of achieving profit maximization above all else, which means that media producers are constantly producing goods

that leave consumers wanting more of their products; in turn, this cycle of production and consumption easily allows for toxic messaging and consequences to flourish among consumers because they become obsessed with the latest products without realizing how unethical or harmful those products may be, which all contributes to establishing a prime environment for blackface to thrive.

Adorno and Horkheimer coined the term “culture industry” to describe how commercial producers of mass culture use technology to justify the production of consumer products for culture and leisure, which “infect[s] everything with sameness” (Bryne 665). The homogeneity in mass cultural products alienates the consumer’s consciousness from their sense of decency and self-awareness and clouds their ability to detect that blackface is not reflective of the way black people behave. Adorno also implies that blackface’s memetic qualities are not only critical to its “life” in circulation, but that the culture industry’s corrupt, white supremacist, profit-oriented mindset has kept blackface alive. He explains that the culture industry prospers by “selling back to the public its own worst feelings and desires” (Bryne 665), meaning that media producers succeed best when they are able to profit from consumers’ insecurities. Thus, in this context of market forces, blackface has provided a “solution” to consumers’ fears of not fitting into mainstream whiteness because the act of physically applying and wearing blackface has permitted them to reassert their whiteness. As David Leonard, professor of comparative ethnic studies and American studies at Washington University observes about this strange phenomenon, “It became a way of proving one’s whiteness because, if one was *becoming* black through blackface then you weren’t black” (Lartey).

Blackface’s ubiquity in mass cultural entertainment not only reflects the racist attitudes of American culture, but has also shaped and is shaping how the country treats the formation of

racial identities and difference. Some of the nation's first ever cinematic films like *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *The Jazz Singer* (1927) popularized blackface and included stereotypical scenes of watermelon eating, cakewalk dancing, and criminal behavior (Bryne 666). As blackface circulates in media, consumers form implicit biases against black people from seeing and unconsciously believing these inaccurate, dangerous representations to be typical of real life, which ignores the struggles and experiences black people have. While blackface is usually associated with the Jim Crow era and the racist past of the 19th and 20th centuries, its racist qualities continue to live on in television shows, movies, and now in its most recent form, on the Internet through the exponentially replicable digital ways that we communicate.

III. Digital Blackface in GIFs

Throughout social media conversations and online chats in the 21st century, digital blackface has evolved into several technological forms of media, including reaction GIFs, Internet memes, and keyboard stickers. Social media researchers Kate Miltner and Tim Highfield define GIF, also known as Graphics Interchange Format, as “a file format that enables the endless looping of image sequences” (2). In online conversations, users commonly send friends reaction GIFs to capture their feelings in response to a situation. *New York Times* contributor Amanda Hess reports that according to *Giphy*, the most popular GIF used by Americans to express happiness is a GIF of Oprah Winfrey screaming into the audience, with her arms flailing wide open in front of her, and the most popular GIF used to express sadness is one of a sad African American lady (see Appendix C). Miltner and Highfield claim that the mass-consumed GIF is not only a representation of the users’ “emotional state, but an illustration of the user’s knowledge of a...text or cultural conversation through their choices” (7). The users’ choices to use black people in GIFs to communicate their emotions explain the concept of “animatedness,”

a term coined by American literary critic Sianne Ngai that describes the tendency to think of black people as excessively emotional and expressive (Hess and Shane). The tendency for media consumers to link traits and behaviors with race is harmful because it foments the development of racist attitudes that in turn allows them to be prejudiced towards black people.

IV. Digital Blackface in Internet Memes

As users continue to send Internet memes that involve digital blackface, this racist, and perhaps unintentionally harmful behavior becomes learned and embedded in communication as seen in Internet memes. Similar to GIFs, memes are still-images captioned with text used to convey an emotional or social message to comment on a situation. One such meme, called the “Confused Nick Young” meme, is a reaction image that features NBA basketball player Nick Young with a perplexed facial expression and question marks surrounding his face. According to *Know Your Meme*, the meme originated from a web series that documents a day in the life of Nick Young, and a picture of a young, confused Nick Young is screenshotted from the video. Black Twitter then subsequently used “Confused Nick Young” to express confusion online, and is often paired with captions that illustrate a situation that does not make sense and is therefore dumb. For example, in Appendix D, the caption says “Me: Damn my stomach hurt, Mom: Yea, cause you always on that damn phone, Me: *Confused Nick Young*.” Creators and consumers of this meme may think that Confused Nick Young is an appropriate, funny, and entertaining response to an illogical situation, but fail to realize that they are appropriating Nick Young from an innocent context that does not pertain to them. Akane Kanai, an associate lecturer in social theory at the University of Newcastle, Australia, describes that in this process of outsourcing their emotional labor to circulating images of Confused Nick Young, the subject’s “[black] bod[y] [is] flattened and simplified,” and then “[black] bodies become free stock which one can

rework and through one's own labor, make one's own" (8). The meme's entertainment value shares qualities of earlier minstrel blackface, where blacks were portrayed with humiliating, negative stereotypes, such as confusion and dumbness. Similarly, the "Roll Safe" meme is a screenshot of actor Kayode Ewumi, smirking and pointing to his temple as he plays the "Roll Safe" character Reece Simpson in the web series *Hood Documentary (Know Your Meme)*. Users often send this meme to joke about poor decision making and weak critical thinking skills. For instance, in Appendix E, this meme has captions that communicate, "You can't get cheated on if you don't get into a relationship *Roll Safe*" or "If you're already late... Take your time... you can't be late twice *Roll Safe*." In these memes, Ewumi's character seems to suggest that by not treating relationships or time with urgency and importance, the consumer can avoid bigger potential consequences.

While these memes are not implying that Nick Young is actually confused or that Kayode Ewumi is lazy and dumb, consumers who are unaware of the context are "free to draw connections between bodies" (Kanai 8) that have been quantified into data. Thus, as Nick Young and Kayode Ewumi become popularized as "stock images" that people digitally exploit, consumers will subconsciously associate their black bodies with negative traits of dumbness and laziness, generating an attitude of black inferiority towards black males and the larger black community. In the reproduction and remixing of these memes that feature black individuals and their expressions, consumers develop the "presumption that any body is free to be used to express a particular sentiment or situation" (Kanai 8). This subtle, racist-normalizing habit becomes increasingly visible and problematic as the expressions of black people are also appropriated in keyboard stickers and in real life.

V. Digital Blackface in Keyboard Stickers

Keyboard stickers, particularly Snapchat Bitmojis, are a direct application of digital blackface. Bitmojis are personalized, cartoon avatars that are used in online messaging applications, like Snapchat, in which users have the ability to choose their Bitmoji's skin color, facial features, and outfits. Bitmojis are essentially personalized, human emojis that are exaggerated with emotions and expressions that often come from black individuals that have been popularized from memes and reaction GIFs. As seen in Appendix F, my Snapchat sticker keyboard has my Bitmoji paired with expressions like "Yasss," "Bye, Felicia," "it me," and "Ain't nobody got time for that!" (from "Sweet Brown" Wilkins). These popular expressions taken from black women and queer communities of color are then used to fit my Bitmoji's body and face. The Snapchat keyboard even features my Bitmoji doing dance moves that were invented by black people, such as "dabbing" and the "whip and nae nae" (see Appendix G). In addition, in daily text messages to friends, users may use phrases like "hey fam," "dat boi," or "it be like that sometimes," which originate from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a dialect of English that slaves spoke with Creole and West African influences (Rickford). Manuel Arturo Abreu calls this phenomenon "Online Imagined Black English" for the popular usage of AAVE being used on the Internet and is "borrowed and deracialized under the guise of being slang" (*Arache*).

Users and developers who do not identify with black and queer identities, but still partake in the creation and sharing of these Bitmojis are complicit in digital blackface because they are participating in cultural appropriation. They have turned these black expressions into a hip trend of popular culture, a trend that ignores the everyday reality of life and death biopolitics black people face. The act of using black bodies to fit our Bitmojis can be explained by French philosopher Michel Foucault, who originates the concept of "docile bodies," bodies that are

created by the State, or those in power, “that have been molded and constructed by...tactics and technologies” (Taylor 187) at their disposal. While GIFs, memes, and Bitmojis may not appear to have direct life or death implications, users who participate in digital blackface place themselves in the same level of authority and power as the State by controlling how the subjects of these black bodies are used.

Thus, the negative impacts and systemic white power messages that digital blackface disseminates have far more importance than the intent of the user and creator, even if they did not intend to be racist. As Jackson writes in *Teen Vogue*, digital blackface “does not describe intent, but an act — the act of inhabiting a black persona.” We can also use the language of social psychology and gender exclusion to understand this racist digital communication. Social psychologists Jane G. Stout and Nilanjan Dasgupta assert that “gender-exclusive language is likely to be a passive form of exclusion, but...may be experienced as an active form of exclusion” (758). This notion can also apply to other social constructs that language informs, such as race. Thus, digital blackface, even in the form of keyboard stickers, is racially-oppressive language because the application of these digital icons of communication are also passive acts of exclusion that work to have severe, active, and exclusive consequences. The more digital blackface is used, the more it requires that audiences pay attention so that they can proactively combat it through committed acts of inclusion and consciousness.

VI. The Normalization of Digital Blackface in Real Life

In August 2017, British-Nigerian BBC writer Victoria Princewill made a video exposing digital blackface, and in response, she faced criticism from online users for being too easily offended by consumers who feel that they are using GIFs and stickers of black people innocuously. In fact, white Israeli American Ethan Klein from h3h3Productions mocked her in a

YouTube video by wearing “whiteface” and arguing that black celebrities, like Kevin Hart and Michael Jackson who are used in GIFs and memes, are entertainers and thus freely participate in a profession that exists solely to entertain others. Klein’s commentary on black entertainers in GIFs illustrates the complex nuances that occur when users send digital images that involve people of color (POC) for their personas, and not their race, but he also largely ignores the significance of a minority group’s being appropriated inhumanely for the entertainment of the majority. The intersection of racism with humor has long been virulent. Media studies professor at the University of Virginia Shipla Davé observes that racism is often “dismissed under the guise of humor” because it reveals truths that people want to deny, namely that the majority derives pleasure from mocking the minority among them, preferring not to face that such “humor” carries within it “censure and satire” (qtd. in Bajaj) for the minority, as demonstrated by Klein’s arguments that it is all just entertainment. Furthermore, Klein also references a top Facebook comment on Princewill’s BBC video on blackface that states how digital blackface distracts from bigger problems like being denied access to healthcare, housing, employment, and education because of skin color.

While digital blackface may not appear to have the same degree of consequences as institutional racism, its usage and circulation in digital language and communication normalizes those kinds of racist attitudes in culture and society and may lead to the current increase in hate crimes. This intertwined relationship of language and culture can be explained by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a theory that states how language greatly affects the thoughts and behaviors of the culture in which it is spoken (Livingstone). Since many younger users are not aware of how they partake in digital blackface in the way they speak and text, they think that blackface is acceptable in real life as well. For example, in May 2017, a senior white male student from Los

Gatos High School dressed as his Bitmoji in blackface to ask for a date to prom (see Appendix H) (Cull). The student was completely unaware how his Bitmoji was the product of digital blackface and has roots in racist blackface tradition. In addition, college students across the nation continue to put on themed blackface fraternity parties, including a 2013 “Bloods and Crips” party at Dartmouth College, along with other themed parties that marginalize POC into racist stereotypes (see Appendix I) (Escobar). Thus, digital blackface promotes blatant racism because it shows that societal norms will tolerate it in everyday life.

VII. The Impact of Digital Blackface on Media Representation, Imagery, and Culture

Ironically, despite African Americans’ high visibility in the digital blackface rampant in GIFs, memes, and stickers, blacks and other POC are not well represented on screen and behind the scenes in Hollywood and mainstream media. For example, the Twitter social movement #OscarsSoWhite in 2016 demonstrated how for the second consecutive year, all actors nominated for leading and supporting roles were white, overlooking lead black actors from critically acclaimed films like *Straight Outta Compton* and *Creed*, but still recognizing their white counterparts as supporting actors and screenwriters. According to *USA Today* journalist Patrick Ryan, up until 2016, in the Academy Awards’ long 88-year history, only 14 black actors have won, along with 5 Latinos, 3 Asians, and 1 Native American actor. The lack of POC winning Oscars can be seen as a reflection of the largely white homogenous academy, which is composed of 94% Caucasian voters and 77% males (Ryan). Not only do consumers already see black people as they are being misrepresented by negative stereotypes in secondary roles, but they also see a disproportionate number of POC on screen, and will thus see that the limited spaces and roles in the Oscars and higher levels of entertainment are all that POC will ever achieve. Because the racially homogenous academy has a large impact on what consumers

perceive as being accepted and valued in media, culture, and societal standards, their hegemonic agenda implies that POC are not important or welcomed in society, which thus reinforces the systematic othering of POC.

For example, in the academy's 90-year-old history, only in 2018 did Jordan Peele finally become the first African American to win an Oscar for best original screenplay (*Desta*). The slow progress in diversifying behind the scenes roles in film and media demonstrate how the narratives of POC have been historically told through the lens of non-POC, which legitimizes the negative traits consumers associate with POC when they see racist stereotypes depicted by blackface. By having more POC as screenwriters and directors, media producers are able to accurately portray stories of POC from their perspectives, which will therefore positively change how consumers view and treat communities of color. For example, African American screenwriters Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole directed *Black Panther*, which featured a majority black cast and was well-received by critics and consumers (*IMDb*). According to *Business Insider*, *Black Panther* was a top ten grossing movie in 2018, reaching \$1.35 billion in the global box office (Clark), which goes to show that fair and diverse representation in the media is more than just a smart and profitable business strategy to attract moviegoers, but that it truly resonates with audiences worldwide. After all, people just want to be *seen* and validated as their true selves, especially on screen, and especially in a growing majority-minority America. Therefore, *Black Panther* was more than just a black superhero movie that addressed narratives of African American and African experiences, but marked a major milestone in equal media representation for POC by demonstrating that their humanity is multifaceted.

VIII. Conclusion

Digital blackface is problematic in digital language and communication because it is rooted in racism and hatred and insidiously propagates both. The various forms of digital blackface resemble racist symbols of the 19th and 20th century minstrel blackface caricatures, now repackaged in different forms of media across the Internet, as seen in the popularity of reaction GIFs, memes, and Snapchat Bitmojis. In using black people as digital symbols to represent their emotional labor, consumers perpetuate racist stereotypes by condemning them to black bodies that can just be reproduced and circulated as stock images, and by thus reducing them to objects, mostly of derision, it ignores their humanity. The lack of positive media representation in Hollywood demonstrates how consumers only appreciate using the aesthetics of black expressions to fit into popular culture, such as through the use of an Oprah GIF, Confused Nick Young meme, or text in Online Imagined Black English. The digital exploitation of black people in media and imagery normalizes unconscious biases that are developed in consumer behavior, attitudes, and culture, which in turn results in unintended social, economic, and political consequences for black people and all other POC. Despite the nuances in Internet GIFs, memes, and stickers with black celebrities, users must be cognizant of their positionality, race, and privilege in society by being aware of their own digital media habits and understanding how digital blackface is a product and legacy of racism.

Although media creators and producers, such as *Giphy*, need to be held accountable for the types of imagery they deploy in mass culture, media consumers have the utmost responsibility in being actively conscious of their digital media habits. In a capitalist, market-oriented society, consumers dictate the types of products, imagery, and messaging that sell best, and their choices and demand for such products directly inform producers. Thus, media users must question the reasons why they are attracted to a particular GIF or meme that portrays a

black individual's expression, realize how that contributes to digital blackface, and boycott that kind of behavior by searching and using alternative images to communicate the same message, such as through cartoons or animals. Most importantly, users must have conversations on social media that recognize and challenge their practices of digital blackface and the systems of oppression that allow for digital blackface to flourish. Because language and culture are inextricably linked, consumers must ultimately recognize the power they have in combating anti-blackness and racism in society by changing the way they communicate in 21st century Internet culture, one meme and one GIF at a time.

IX. Appendices

Appendix A

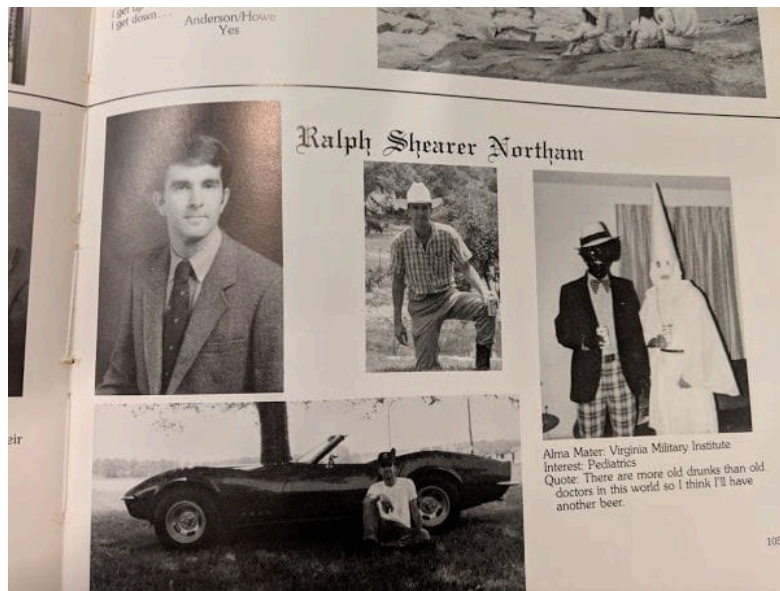


Figure 1. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam’s page in the 1984 yearbook of Eastern Virginia Medical School shows a photo of a man in blackface and another person in a Ku Klux Klan robe. Obtained from *The Washington Post*.

Appendix B



Figure 1. NeNe Leakes from *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. *Teen Vogue*.



Figure 2. Oprah Winfrey, Tyra Banks, Mariah Carey, “Sweet Brown” Wilkins, and NBA players, such as “Crying Michael Jordan.” Screenshots of GIFs compiled from *Giphy*.

Appendix C



Figure 1. “Excited Oprah GIF” from *Giphy*.



Figure 2. A GIF of a sad African American lady from *Giphy*.

Appendix D

Me: Damn my stomach hurt

Mom: Yea, cause you always on that damn phone

Me:



“Confused Nick Young” meme from *Know Your Meme*.

Appendix E

You can't get cheated on if you don't get into a relationship

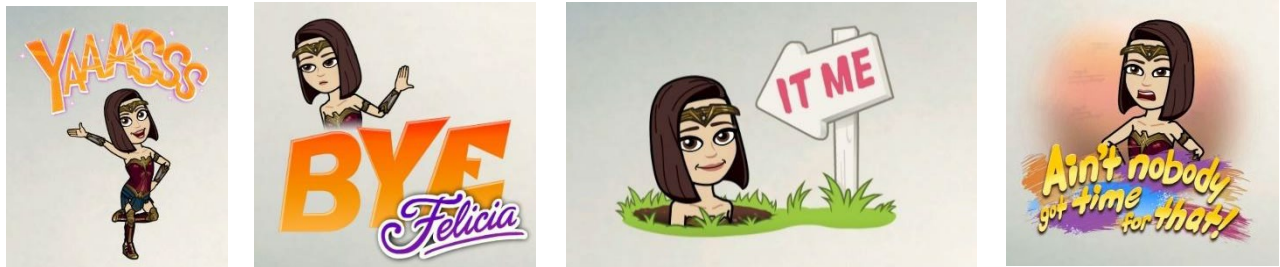


If you're already late.. Take your time.. You can't be late twice.



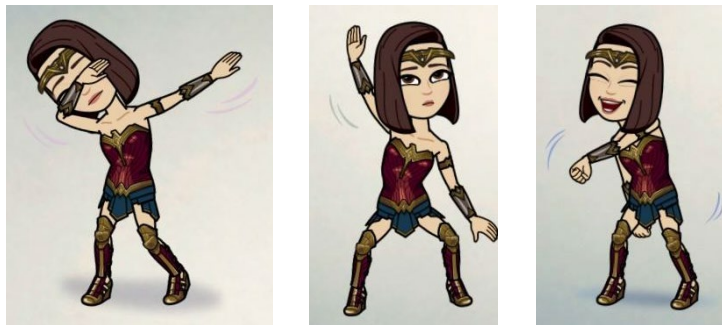
“Roll Safe” Meme, featuring actor Kayode Ewumi as character “Roll Safe” Reece Simpson from the web series *Hood Documentary*. Compiled from *Know Your Meme*.

Appendix F



My Snapchat Bitmoji paired with popular expressions that have been appropriated from AAVE and black culture. From my Snapchat Bitmoji keyboard.

Appendix G



My Snapchat Bitmoji “dabbing” and doing the “whip and nae nae,” dances invented by black artists. The “dab” is credited as being first seen in Atlanta rapper Skipka da Flippa’s 2014 music video, “How Fast Can You Count It.” Teen rapper Silentó popularized the “whip and nae nae” in his music video “Watch Me” in 2015 (Spanos). Stickers are from my Snapchat Bitmoji keyboard.

Appendix H



A senior student from Los Gatos High School copies his Snapchat Bitmoji, and wears blackface for a prom proposal. *NBC Bay Area*.

Appendix I



Figure 1. Dartmouth College: Alpha Delta & Tri-Delta’s “Bloods and Crips” Party (2013). Students dressed as a Blood or Crip, in reference to the predominantly black street gangs in Los Angeles. *The Gloss*.



Figure 2. University of Florida: Beta Theta Pi's Blackface Party (2012). *The Gloss*.

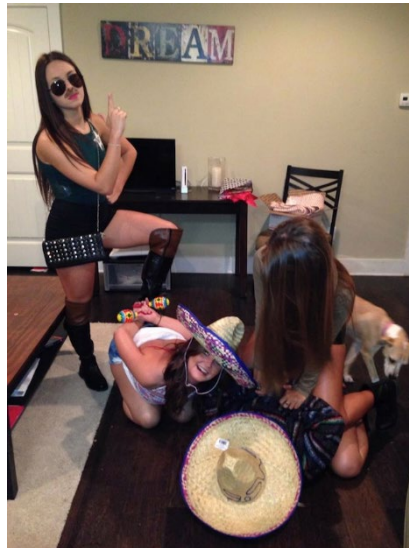


Figure 3. Texas Tech: Sexy Border Patrol Party (2013). Sorority girls from Zeta Tau Alpha dressed up as “sexy” border patrol cops and Mexican immigrants. *The Gloss*.

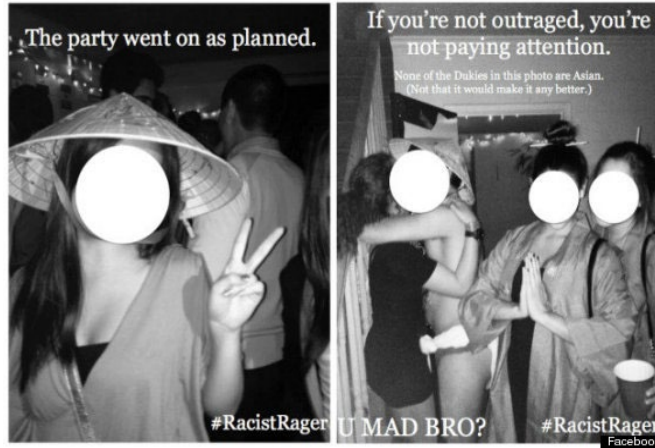


Figure 4. Duke University: Kappa Sigma’s Asia Prime Party (2013). The email invitation included a puppet character of Kim Jong II from *Team America* saying, “Herro Nice Duke Peopre” to mock an east Asian accent. *The Gloss*.