Media, Myth, and Modernity: Black Communities and Digital Counterpublics Against Persona and Citational Theft, Racial Archetypes, and Linguistic Appropriation of Identity

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Abstract

Non-Black demographics are increasingly performing Black identity through various media modes, including the adoption of Black "personas" or avatars, appropriation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and creditless reproduction of Black creative property via social media (Grieve et al. 294). Twitter is a digital space wherein with the absence of corporeal signifiers, racial identity is performed through what Sarah Florini dubs the practice of signifyin'— "figurative language, indirectness, doubleness, and wordplay as a means of conveying multiple layers of meaning" (Florini 1). However, the concept of digital space means that "the body can be obscured or even imitated" in various manifestations of mockery, extending to corporate-representing Twitter accounts' engaging with consumers (Florini 1). Linguistic appropriation contributes to a "linguistic system of pejoration and racialization of African Americans," which continues to punish Black people through discriminatory AAVE-gatekeeping practices (Smokoski 62; Grogger; Cocchiara). This paper will evaluate how the seizure of Black creative property without recognition contributes to citational appropriation. Furthermore, this paper will evaluate the response of the community of Black, queer, feminist women and femmes on Twitter in light of this oppression, and consider the ways this community adapts to use Twitter as an autonomous counterpublic and spotlight for the uplift of reclamation of their intellectual ownership.

Keywords: Twitter; social media; Race; Linguistics; AAVE

I. Introduction

Non-Black demographics are increasingly performing Black identity through various media modes, including the adoption of Black "personas" or avatars, appropriation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and creditless reproduction of Black creative property via social media (Grieve et al. 294).

Twitter is a digital space wherein with the absence of corporeal signifiers, racial identity is performed through what Sarah Florini dubs the practice of *signifyin'*—"figurative language, indirectness, doubleness, and wordplay as a means of conveying multiple layers of meaning" (Florini 1). However, the concept of digital space means that "the body can be obscured or even imitated" in various manifestations of mockery, extending to corporate-representing Twitter accounts' engaging with consumers (Florini 1). The appropriation of Black identity via media is not novel—it takes root in histories of archetypal minstrelsy from Blackface to the outgroup appropriation of jazz and hip-hop, and its insidious and longstanding practice is simply spotlighted by the global rise of Twitter and other social media (Roth-Gordon et al. 126-127). Linguistic appropriation contributes to a "linguistic system of pejoration and racialization of African Americans," which continues to punish Black people through discriminatory AAVE-gatekeeping practices (Smokoski 62; Grogger; Cocchiara). Furthermore, I argue that the seizure of Black creative property without recognition contributes to similar harms of citational appropriation. Appropriators perform recognizably-Black features while disembodying and denying Black presence visually and textually in a simultaneous presentation and denial of Blackness that allows non-Black audiences to consume and participate in the culture and language from a comfortable distance (Roth-Gordon et al. 126-127). This reproduces a dynamic where "Black labor and creativity are fundamental to producing white comfort" (Roth-Gordon et al. 127). The specific community that sits at the brunt of these oppressive forces is intersectional, and it is not by accident that they are foundational to the rise and influence of Black Twitter at large: Black, queer women and femmes that use social media for Black feminist discourse. This paper will examine how multiple phenomena—avatar or "persona" theft, linguistic theft, and intellectual or citational theft work in mythological tandem in the oppression of the community that leads linguistic production and the rise of Black Twitter itself: Black, queer women and femmes on Twitter (Roth-Gordon et al. 110). This paper will question the implications of such theft, which the Black Panther Party outlined in 1966 by the third tenet of the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program—"We Want An End to the Robbery By the Capitalists of Our Black Community" ("The Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program."). This repetitious adaptation of White-on-Black theft leads this paper to consider how histories of Black identity's appropriation have never been resolved but only *adapted* as technologies modernized.

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Furthermore, this paper will evaluate the response of the community of Black, queer, feminist women and femmes on Twitter in light of this oppression, and consider the ways this community adapts to use Twitter as an autonomous counterpublic and spotlight for the uplift of reclamation of their intellectual ownership.

II.   Background: Appropriation of Black Identity Throughout Modern History

The appropriation of Black identity finds its origins in minstrelsy and performative Blackface, propagating harmful stereotypes such as the "Mammy," "Uncle," and "Sambo"—"notions of the mind" that employ a "total distortion" and have come to shape distorted perceptions of racialized groups that have endured throughout history (*Ethnic Notions* 43:38; 45:16). Furthermore, both minstrelsy and Blackface performances drew monetary profit from the fetishizing and appropriation of the simultaneously rejected racialized "other," captured by bell hooks in 1992 in the named process of consumption or "eating the other" (hooks; Kuo et al.). According to E. Patrick Johnson, "[c]ultural usurpation" is a method of "keeping the non-White 'in their place'"—and racist propaganda, or "spectacles of primitivism," is used to justify the colonial racist gaze and allow "fetishistic 'escape' into the Other" fueling the capitalist gains of racialized commodification (Kido Lopez 170). Overall, the productions of stereotypes serve to *distort*—for instance, through Blackface, a fetishizing production of stereotypes, White Americans—"[b]y distorting the features and culture of African Americans. . . including their looks, language, dance, deportment, and character"—were able to "codify *Whiteness* across class and geopolitical lines as its ["racial"] antithesis" ("Blackface: The Birth of An American Stereotype").

In "Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music, and White Supremacy," Bill Yousman interrogates the interconnected concepts of "Blackophilia" and "Blackophobia" in younger White generations—which manifest as the proximally "parasitic" consumption of and fascination with Black popular culture juxtaposed with simultaneous fear of Black people (Yousman 366; 369; 371). Yousman evaluates notable outgroup consumption of hip-hop as an expression of Blackophilia—observing, for instance, that as many as 70% of rap music buyers in 2000 were White, and that much of White youth "affectionately" adopt AAVE in congruence with their affinity for hip-hop (Yousman 367). Yousman argues that what may seem to be "benign" Blackophilia-related consumption is

countered by manifestations of Blackophobia and white supremacy, citing evidence that the growth of youth representation in 2002's 708 organized white supremacist groups, which doubled the membership total of the neo-Nazi group National Alliance in 1999—as well as and the 20-percent increase in Internet website devoted to Black-directed hate in 1999-2000 (Yousman 370-371). The interrelated concepts of Blackophilia and Blackophobia stem from what Yousman dubs a form of "domestic orientalism," or "internal other[hood]"—a justification for exclusion and repression (Yousman 386). Relatedly, Yousman invokes bell hooks' 1992 cultural theory of "eating the other"—the commodification of cultural difference as an avenue of titillation for White consumption (Yousman 378). hooks explained that this practice allowed White people to cope with identity in a modern capitalist society, vicariously experience sensory pleasures through "transgression" into an unfamiliar culture, and resolve their guilt involving Black repression (Yousman 378). Language appropriation, or "linguistic minstrelsy," can be considered one of such transgressions (Roth-Gordon et al. 110). For instance, AAVE was appropriated by White singer Helen O'Connell in *1941*—in the same year that four Americans were lynched for being Black (Lehn 1). Lehn observes that O'Connell sings the verses "In the lingo of hi-de-ho / when the Harlem rhythms flow. / Here's the way to say, yes I know, / Man, that's Groovy!" not to credit, advocate for, or proximate herself to AAVE-speakers, but to affirm cultural and political authority—White hegemony—by dipping into the economic and political capital of the Harlem jazz community (Lehn 1). This paper will examine how linguistic and citational appropriation acts as a tool of White hegemony, especially put in the context of social media's modern allowances for anonymity and avoidance for consequences of such transgressions.

In the translation to digital space, the modern prevalence of Black Twitter is met with an age-old issue of cultural consumption or "eating the other"—enabling Blackface to take form in another camouflaged capacity (hooks). According to Florini, for racial identity to "function" in such social media spaces, ". . . racialized users must make those identities visible online" (Florini 224). In other words, in the absence of "reliable corporeal signifiers of racial difference," the act of "signifyin'" identity as "difference" must be actively marked or performed in order to be understood—taking form in verbal performances, displays of "cultural competence," linguistic resources, modes of interaction, and other "noncorporal signifiers" that express social and cultural resources (Florini 224). However, as examined in the following case studies, the ability

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of social media to afford processes of "signifyin'" also allows signifiers to undergo processes of obscuring and imitation (Florini 224)—or "digital Blackface," enacted by deceptive avatars, linguistic use of AAVE, and claim to Black creative property without credit. Such deception inspired the movement #yourslipisshowing—an effort by Black Twitter feminists Shafiqah Hudson and I'Nasah Crockett created to defend against and expose the true identities and transgressive persona theft of far-right fake accounts posing to be queer, Black women in their efforts to disseminate controversial fake hashtags such as #EndFathersDay on the premise of "fake rage" to "[lure the Internet] into believing a stereotype of Black [queer] women" and destroy their credibility (Hampton 1). Ironically, their work in itself was erased and attributed to the intellect of White men—which is a form of citational theft examined in the following analyses.
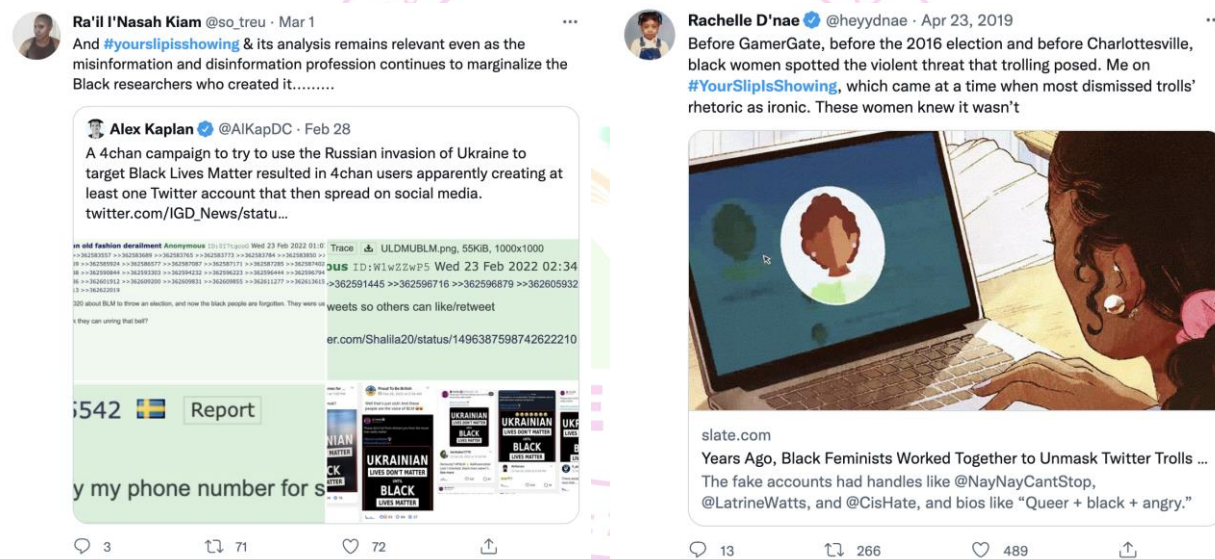
(Addendum).

III.   Materials and Methodology

    Black Twitter found its origin in a broader context of a disproportionately large representation of Black Twitter users. By 2017, studies had shown that 26 percent of Twitter users were Black, compared to 24 percent White and 20 percent Latinx; furthermore, 69 percent of Black Americans used at least one social media website (Maragh-Lloyd 164-165). Black Twitter's online space gained popularity as it allowed Black users to ". . . easily commune online

through cultural markers as well as display and develop individual and collective self-definitions" (Maragh-Lloyd 163). Twitter, as an interface, allows cultural affordances—defying its typical instrumental evaluations as a social microblog, social network, and messaging application—through the mediation of "temporal, electronic, and structural discourse" (Brock 529). While its online audiences exist "only as written" textually via linguistic and stylistic choices, Twitter's "@" function reinforces addressivity and content brevity, reducing the time necessary for social interaction, and "paradoxically" allowing increased engagement and social connections (Brock 529). Thus Black users "retrofit" Twitter's technological affordances—from the accessibility and publicity of hashtag-oriented discourses to character limitations—to form an autonomous counter-public acting against dominant media narratives (Maragh-Lloyd 166). This paper will examine how multiple, separate phenomena—avatar or "persona" theft, linguistic theft, and intellectual or citational theft work in tandem in the oppression of the community that leads linguistic production and the rise of Black Twitter itself: Black, queer women and femmes on Twitter (Roth-Gordon et al. 110). Multiple screenshots of Tweets, biographies, and Twitter threads will be analyzed in isolation and connection to construct a discussion on the digital affordances of modern appropriation, its effects, and the resistance the affected community expresses. Each will be discussed through case studies from which all screenshots were extracted from the Twitter platform and belong to their respective owners.

IV.   Media Analyses and Discussion: Linguistic Blackface

As noted, the non-Black practice of appropriated AAVE contributes to what Smokoski calls a "linguistic system of pejoration and racialization of African Americans," continuing a history of punishment inflicted toward Black people through discriminatory AAVE-gatekeeping practices (Smokoski 62; Grogger; Cocchiara). The past decades have evidenced notable growth in technological communication, particular cultural fixation on the social media platform Twitter, and the controversial adoption of AAVE into wider colloquial vernacular by non-Black identifying groups—known as "outgroup" use, Mock AAVE, or linguistic theft (Smokoski; Roth-Gordon et al. 110). Manhattan Institute linguist John McWhorter concurs that "Black English" is becoming the *lingua franca* of America's youth (Henderson 1). One particular critical Twitter discourse, which centers on a TikTok posted by @brittany_broski, highlights this meeting of crossroads—asserting the criticized opinion that many AAVE terms rather belong to

general "internet" or "stan" culture, and that it is "how 'we all' speak" (Overs 1). Meanwhile, popular companies like Domino's and Wawa have made public use of AAVE on their Twitter postings in an attempt to draw profit from a largely-White audience—for instance, Domino's Pizza @Dominos Tweeted the following in June 2015:
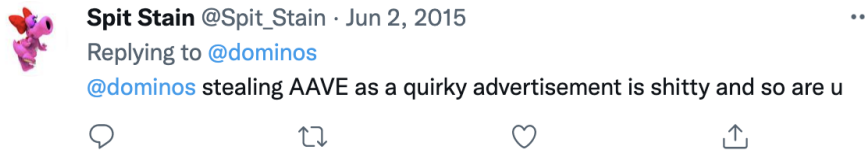

(Addendum).

This thread's 145 retweets and 263 likes come from an overwhelmingly White audience of users, while the nature of its responses reveals a dismissive perspective on the validity and respect attributable to AAVE, and consequently AAVE speakers and producers—which largely fall into the category of Black, queer women on Twitter (Grieve et al. 294; 314). One response reads:
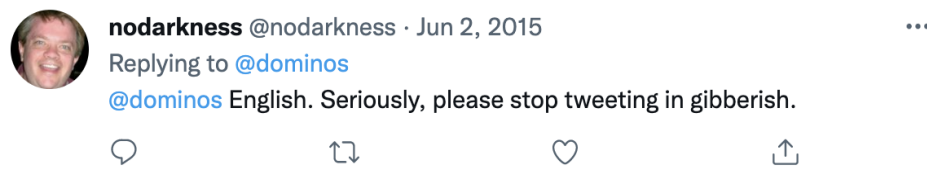
(Adde

ndum).

User @nodarkness' response reveals the insidious perspective that AAVE is separate from English—furthermore, they imply that the dialect is "nonsense" or "unintelligible or meaningless speech or writing." Ironically, the mutilation of AAVE, not the use of AAVE, is the producer of the misalignment of meaning in speech. In Dominos' Tweet, AAVE is intentionally warped—creating gibberish in a meta-aware acknowledgment of its own "playfulness"—to both capitalize off of and render "laughable" the legitimate usage of AAVE. Of the twenty-five responses to Dominos' initial Tweet, mixed in positive and negative reception, only one mentions the obvious: seizure of AAVE for monetary profit. User @Spit_Stain condemns the account's transgression with the following Tweet:

Spit Stain @Spit_Stain · Jun 2, 2015

Replying to @dominos

@dominos stealing AAVE as a quirky advertisement is shitty and so are u

(Addendum).

The rarity of such responses is attributable to the fact that it is *counterproductive* for offended Black users to argue with the original post—due to the nature of the platform and "engagement" operations, interactions such as quotations and retweets effectively disseminate the original content more widely and increases platform invisibility, and thereby profit, of the offenders.   The lack of Black users' interaction with this post is notable, with only the aforementioned single Tweet "calling out" the appropriation of AAVE publicly.   On a wider scale, an alternative mode of interaction to linguistic appropriation is inspired to express and produce dissent: the foundation of a Twitter account dedicated to "calling out" brands for linguistic theft (Roth-Gordon et al. 110).

Brands Saying Bae

@BrandsSayingBae

It's cool when a corporation tweets like a teenager. It makes me want to buy the corporation's products.

◎ Hell ▦ Joined December 2014

259 Following   **39.3K** Followers

(Addendum).

@BrandsSayingBae is one account that publicizes such dissent.   Its creative use of profile "location" is designated "Hell," testifying that true AAVE users' witness to the outgroup butchering of AAVE inflicts pain—standing as a testament to Dill's conclusion that racialized media and the mental health of racialized individuals' behavior and self-perception and *Ethnic Notions'* assertion that the "best way to maintain a cycle of oppression" deals with the psyche (Dill; *Ethnic Notions* 54:46).

@BrandsSayingBae exhibits sarcasm in its statement, "It's cool when a corporation tweets like a teenager. It makes me want to buy the corporation's products."   However, usage of the description ". . . like a teenager" is a misnomer for "in African American Vernacular English," the lack of recognition of which is harmful in its own right.   One of

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@BrandsSayingBae's most popular posts includes a screenshot of the following Tweet, which spotlights controversial discourse from popular brands Wawa, Jack in the Box, and Wingstop:
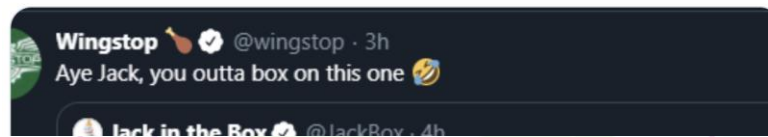

(Addendum).

User @BrandsSayingBae responds with the following statement:

(Addendum).

With this response, @BrandsSayingBae spotlights the fact that brand representatives have the capacity to *hide* behind their brand when Tweeting from a digital platform. Their avatar, biography, and other identifying information are completely "covered" by the brand, and in this privilege of anonymity, they are protected from criticism and empowered to appropriate language and culture sans consequence. Despite the rhetorically suggestive nature of its demand, @BrandsSayingBae calls to light the idea of "post[ing] a pic[ture] of [oneself] when posting. . . like this," suggesting that the appropriation of Black language, culture, and identity is so widespread in outgroup users that verification of authenticity—importantly, *protective* verification that seeks to stop performance with malignant intent—is necessary.

@AAVEPolice was established with an identical purpose, though it can trace its origins to an overt request for moderating "outgroup" usage of AAVE. This account formed in response to a Tweet by user @finessen that suggested the incorrect usage of AAVE by non-Black people, or outgroup use, was so prevalent that it should be acknowledged on a higher-visibility platform—furthermore, the suggestion would have a broader effect of saving individual Black

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users the emotional labor of correcting and identifying transgressions independently each time they occur.
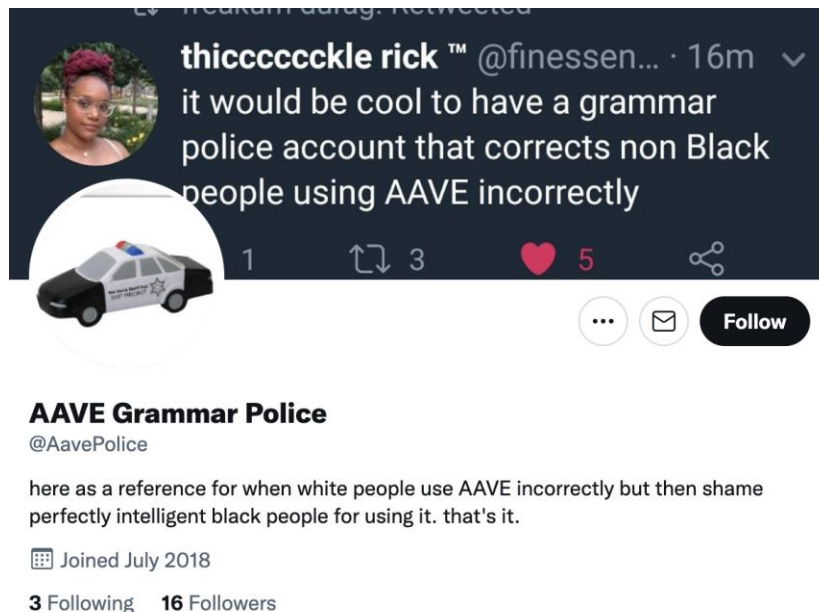
(Addendum).

@AAVEPolice formed in response to @finessen's comment, visually spotlighting the user's original Tweet in their biographical header. The concept of "African American Vernacular English grammar policing" harkens to the idea of general "grammar policing," the behavior of which the Free Dictionary defines as "[s]omeone or a group of people who insist on correcting or criticizing others for errors in spelling, grammar, and syntax" ("The Grammar Police"). The lexical marriage of "grammar police" with "AAVE" expresses the fact that AAVE possesses valid, correct, and thus erroneous versions of spelling, grammar, and syntax—it is a dialect that has the capacity to be used incorrectly, which @AAVEPolice brings to light through its platform.

@AAVEPolice failed to garner a widespread following in its four years of activity. Not insignificantly, it has a much less numerous following than that of @BrandsSayingBae, which never directly cites the problem of stealing *AAVE*, but acts as if it is the stealing of "teenagers' language." However, despite @AAVEPolice's comparative lack of popularity, the existence of the account is often used as an *invocation*, apostrophe, hashtag, or referential tag that collectively gathers a roundup of transgressions on the scale of wider community contributions. Individual users on Black Twitter use the existence of the username @AAVEPolice to create understood apostrophe with sarcastic connotations, not necessarily expecting @AAVEPolice—which has

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been inactive for four years since 2018—to actively respond to or even notice the tag. This invocation—accompanied by screenshots of transgressions or occurring in "reply mode" to such transgressions—allows the visibility of reprimand to occur without individual Black users' need to interact or spend unnecessary labor *explaining* why such targeted Tweets are offensive, inappropriate, and incorrect, as displayed in the following 2021 references to the stagnant @AAVEPolice account:

(Addendum).

(Addendum).

(Addendum).

Another rendition of "AAVE policing" emerged with the formation of the residual account @AAVEPolice_. This account features only one posted Tweet to date, as follows:

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(Addendum).

In a similar vein to @BrandsSayingBae's request to "see proof" of Blackness, @AAVEPolice_ posts a single photo that submits evidence of Black identity. The notion that Black identity should be proven online points to serious causal implications—that appropriation of outgroup stolen and appropriated Black identity runs so rampant on social media, even on a *commercial* scale, that it necessitates in-group defense. Another Twitter account constructed for a similar purpose of defense against linguistic theft—"aave struggle tweets," or @aavenb, submits similar confirmation of Black identity within its biography as a testament to this necessity (Roth-Gordon et al. 110):

(Addendum).

@aavenb's posts occasionally consist of simply a screenshot without independent text, reliant upon its Black audience's ingroup knowledge to infer and understand the failings within its spotlighted content. One such screenshot appears as follows:

(Addendum).

The simple dissemination of a screenshot, which is met with successful understanding and response—including ninety-three likes from a majority Black audience—testifies that the erroneous nature of outgroup AAVE is blatantly obvious and offensive to the extent that overt commentary is not necessary to expose it. The nature of a screenshot is importantly *static*—by screenshotting rather than *actively* engaging with the original content, the dissenting user is able to voice their disapproval without garnering more views, retweets, and likes for the original user. This passive process not only withholds empowerment of the transgressors being criticized but protects the psyche by allowing two interconnected discourses to split into two separate threads with different targeted audiences—one notably White and one notably Black—protecting its *own* followers and interactors from interaction with user accounts that have already revealed themselves to mock Black people.

Furthermore, the passive display of such transgressions through screenshots invites responses, including via textual analysis and criticism. User @motherFNprincess points out the wrong "mixture" of regional dialects displayed in the above transgression:
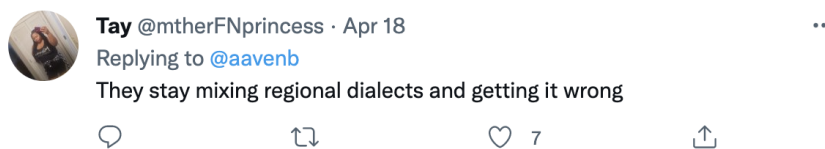
(Addendum).

In this discourse, user @motherFNprincess points attention to the fact that AAVE is extremely nuanced, refuting the 20th-century arguments that projected AAVE as a monolithic language "style" sans regional dialects (Grieve et al. 313). One form of oppression is linguistic

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discrimination—the belief that "anyone" can use AAVE without effort or study, operating on the logic that because it was invented and belongs to a group deemed "inferior" it is automatically accessible to groups deemed "superior." Linguistic theft, and the dismissive views that propagate it, fail to acknowledge the rich diversity within AAVE and the rich geographic diversity of Black people across the United States (Roth-Gordon et al. 110). For instance, Grieve et al. were able to identify multiple major origin sites of AAVE-based lexical innovations congruent with geography, population patterns, and cultural patterns—Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, D.C.; and New Orleans, Louisiana (Grieve et al. 309; 312).

V.   Media Analyses and Discussion: Citational Theft

Another manifestation of digital theft is the stealing of creative property, or omission of proper citational reference to knowledge produced by Black, queer women and femmes—a transgression that supports the "lost history" or erasure of Black inventors and intellectual property from history in scholarship across all fields (Smith 1). As with @BrandsSayingBae and @AAVEPolice, the prevalence of this theft motivated the existence of dual account and hashtag pairs @CiteBlackWomen or #CiteBlackWomen and @CiteASista or #CiteASista.

(Addendum).

@CiteASista's biography centers on inclusivity and the visibility of the community of queer, feminist Black women and femmes in their work, citing its goals to disrupt *both* White Supremacy and White Feminism. @CiteBlackWomen likewise centers on inclusivity,

emphasizing that it aims to be a global movement and creatively tagging its location "The Diaspora."

(Addendum).

@sheathescholar summarizes the pertinence of citations when referring to Black creative property in their following Tweet, which makes an important distinction between active and passive sharing:

(Addendum).

By the statement "[s]hare widely and discuss, but make sure to #citeasista," @sheathescholar points out that the act of passively "sharing widely" and "discuss[ing]"—though it seems beneficial—exists *apart* from actively citing Black women, which is often a step that is omitted or overlooked in social media discourse. This omission propagates a history of erasure of Black creative property, or its repurposing as "White" inventions—a modern transgression that motivated 2021's strike of Black Tiktok choreographers, whose choreography White users were copying without credit and deriving fame for it (Samuel). On Twitter, the seemingly positive acts of [solely] sharing and interacting with a Black creator's post exist in removal from attributing true *credit*, which follows a problematic history of erasure and patent denial (Smith 1).

Furthermore, #CiteBlackWomen operates as a hashtag binding positive discourse and spotlight on Black women's achievements—and often Black, queer women's achievements. The

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most popular posts using the hashtag center on achievement in the community of Black women and femmes. Scholar @CapricePhillips celebrates a citation on her research:

(Addendum).

The spotlight of this community's accomplishments, and their reception spread through post interaction, spreads waves of uplifting resistance in a culture that repeatedly diminishes the value of their creative property and joy in tandem. As user @WillieETCarver states,

(Addendum).

Though the Twitter discourse bound together by the hashtag umbrellas #CiteBlackWomen and #CiteASista are overwhelmingly positive, they respond to some discourses that serve protective functions akin to the invocation of #aavepolice. For instance, user @DrYasmiyn points out that citational omission or the intentional ignorance of Black ownership in the repurposing of their knowledge "reproduces *Whiteness*" (emphasis added):

(Addendum).

Citational theft takes form in the appropriation in ownership of Black creators' knowledge. This occurred, for instance, in *The New Yorker*'s April 2022 appropriation of Professor Tera Hunter's intellectual labor on a topic they reproduced almost identically and from which they reaped credential and monetary profit with only peripheral reference to Hunter despite heavy usage of her research published in 1997:

(Addendum).

(Addendum).

> **Deborah E. McDowell** ···
> @dem8z
>
> It would have been good to see the prize-winning groundbreaking work of @Tera Hunter referenced in this article. 1/
>
> Black washerwomen in the South went on strike and changed U.S. labor - The Washington Post
>
> washingtonpost.com
> How Black washerwomen in the South became pioneers of American labor
> In 1866, a year after Emancipation, formerly enslaved Black female workers launched a widespread work stoppage and jump-started a wave of Black-led …
>
> 9:24 PM · Apr 17, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone
>
> 436 Retweets 37 Quote Tweets 1,854 Likes

(Addendum).

Such phenomena are not isolated incidents, but occur in a greater context of erasure of Black women's work. For instance, in October 2020, *The Washington Post* committed a similar undermining transgression in their reproduction of the work of the Black queer women foundational to the exposé of fake alternative-right trolls in 2014:

> **Chris Geison** @ChrisGeison · Oct 13, 2020 ···
> It is profoundly disappointing that this article didn't credit the work of @sassycrass @so_treu & @Blackamazon, who have been on this since 2014 (#YourSlipIsShowing). Instead they interview 3 white guys. As a white guy, let me just say: Erasure of Black women's work is real.
>
> > **The Washington Post** ✓ @washingtonpost · Oct 13, 2020
> > Fake accounts from supposed Black Trump supporters gain thousands of followers in just a few days before Twitter can take them down
> > wapo.st/3jVBFJn
>
> 💬 4   🔁 259   ♡ 452   ⬆

(Addendum).

The Washington Post failed to attribute even peripheral credit to the queer Black women who originally used Twitter to disrupt alternative-right persona theft, omitting their work in *totality*. Against this canvas of determined invisibility and denial of intellectual labor, it is evident that the uplift and celebration of Black intellectual achievement—and the movement to cite Black

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creators through the dual hashtag-account pairs #CiteBlackWomen/@CiteBlackWomen and #CiteASista/@CiteASista—are necessary to guard against citational theft and omission lest historical miscredit and its devastating consequences reoccur.

VI.   Conclusion

While Twitter has exposed modern evolutions of appropriation made possible by new media affordances, social media is not the origin of the appropriation of Black identity—rather, it merely reflects some of many historical culprits and precedents.   The consumption and appropriation of Blackness via "Tweeted" language and digital avatars in the 2000s was preceded by the earlier appropriation of jazz and hip-hop culture in the 1990s (Roth-Gordon et al. 126-127).   The nature of digital space brings the evolution and allowances for camouflage of cultural appropriation and exists as symptomatic, telling units of Black identity appropriation that have existed for centuries.   Previous literature has shone much light on the occurrence of avatar or persona theft, but less attention has been paid to the theft of language and creative property, and how all three unique instances of appropriation work in tandem to uphold the continued oppression of Blackness.

African American Vernacular English's appropriation by outgroup speakers and largely non-Black populations is propagated by the rise of social media—particularly Twitter—and the Black Twitter community has specific cultural value and linguistic production in the AAVE lexicon (Ronkin and Karn 373; Roth-Gordon et al. 115; Smokoski 53; Grieve et al. 294). Though non-Black users and even corporate accounts intend to present as "trendy," the "outgroup" appropriation and commodification of Blackness—a type of modern minstrelsy— propagates inherently harmful sociolinguistic consequences built on White hegemony and the commodification of cultural difference (Yousman 378).   Stereotype-rampant, overly-simplified, and ill-informed parodies of AAVE suggest that it is simply defined by the pejoration and disorder of standard English, and not a legitimate dialect with grammar and vocabulary (Ronkin and Karn 373).   Alternatively, those who delegitimize AAVE believe that because AAVE is Black creative property, "anyone" can speak in the dialect—propagating a view of Blackness as illegitimate through a dismissive view of "gibberish" (Addendum).   In this appropriation, stylizers allow AAVE appropriators to proximate themselves with qualities that hold positive associations for them as "-Black" speakers—including toughness, hypersexuality, or urbanity—

counterpositioning themselves as "outside" the expectations of mainstream middle-class White values but simultaneously propagating negative stereotypes of legitimate AAVE-speakers (Smokoski iv; 62). Figures featured in Part IV—depicting controversial discourse from popular brands Wawa, Jack in the Box, and Wingstop, as well as the dismissive reception this audience provided—propagate this view through their usage of AAVE to a primarily-White audience. Outgroup AAVE Tweets often garner widespread public attention or retweets through both positive and negative interaction with the original content—but Black Twitter users have voiced that the appropriation in these Tweets offers no enjoyment or comfort to Black audiences (Roth-Gordon et al. 114). Therefore it is clear that these messages are not *intended* for Black audiences. Through inserting "familiar references to Whiteness," companies attempt to balance "play" with AAVE and Black culture—therefore circulating their attempts at AAVE with the effect of providing White comfort (Roth-Gordon et al. 114; 122).

While companies generate profit through linguistic appropriation, persona anonymity, and maintenance of racial inequality, Black creators—widely Black, queer women and femmes (Grieve et al. 294; 314)—are denied both intellectual and monetary credit through linguistic omission and theft made possible through new media's affordances (Kido Lopez; Roth-Gordon et al. 108). The stark contrast between companies' profit on AAVE appropriation and Black creators' lack of monetization is reflected, for instance, in Peaches Monroee's lack of monetization for her 2014 coinage of the AAVE term "fleek"—while it was simultaneously and widely used in corporate advertising, and even printed on Target and Amazon products (Roth-Gordon et al. 108). The figures featured in Part V spotlight efforts to acquire citational credit and recognition of Black ownership in the reproduction of their knowledge under the dual hashtag-account pairs #CiteBlackWomen/@CiteBlackWomen and #CiteASista/@CiteASista. Part V also spotlights discourses unbound to hashtags that demonstrate the erasure or appropriation of Black women's intellectual work in the reproduction of Whiteness. Ultimately, the analyses of figures in Part IV and Part V display that modern forms of appropriation articulate and propagate anti-Blackness, reinforce negative stereotypes particularly affecting the community of Black queer women and femmes on Twitter, and works to uphold social and linguistic White hegemony that attempts to oppress them at multiple intersections (Ronkin and Karn 373). However, in resistance to these efforts, Black, queer women and femmes use media as a tool and spotlight for innovative hashtags whose popularity contributes to the uplift of

reclamation of their intellectual ownership—including that of language itself. This community repurposes Twitter as a tool to "challenge and dispute" White hegemony, confront identity appropriation, and lack of responsibility to rectify injustices by "unmask[ing] how the public transcript of a master narrative justifies the continued subordination of people of color" (Wing Sue 24). As prominent and longstanding as the history of Black appropriation in American history is the history of Black responses of resistance and autonomy. Against its affordances for the anonymous appropriation of Black identity, Black and queer women and femmes have continued to create dissenting media discourses—many of which intentionally and physically split from engagement with White spaces through passive post interactions, adapting Twitter as a tool for identity and language-based defense, self-preservation of the psyche, and autonomous intervention on White public space (Maragh-Lloyd 541).

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