Synthetic Blackness: Digital Blackface and the AI-Generated Race Problem

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While the internet may be dead, its sociopolitical impacts are very much alive, especially when considering the virulent spread of anti-Black misogyny. In "The Dead Internet Theory," Muzumdar et al. warn that "modern online platforms have transitioned from spaces of genuine human interaction to ecosystems dominated by artificial activity, primarily driven by bots, AI-generated content, and corporate algorithms." This phenomenon "[keeps] real users engaged through curated content but at the expense of genuine social connectivity" and "results in sanitized, homogenized content that suppresses dissent and originality."[1] I argue that this AI- and bot-driven feedback loop already has and will have more drastic, existential effects for Black America. This "feedback loop" extends what Isiah Lavender calls the "hyperreal violence loop," or the ongoing reproduction of systemic violence against Black people from the colonial period to now. To Lavender, records and representations of anti-Black violence, from the slave narrative to local news reports, make "past and present realities come together, making it impossible to distinguish one from the other, resulting in unending paradigms of violence" in a constant feedback loop.[2] Using Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Lavender posits that the extremity and ubiquity of anti-Black violence thus constructs a hyperreality where "reality and simulated reality become impossible to differentiate."[3] My position is that synthetic, or AI-generated, media brings this hyperreality into existence where digitized simulacra of Blackness now threaten to replace real experiences and expressions of Black identity. Out of

[1] Prathamesh Muzumdar et al., "The Dead Internet Theory: A Survey on Artificial Interactions and the Future of Social Media," *Asian Journal of Research in Computer Science* 18, no. 1 (2025): 71, https://doi.org/10.9734/ajrcos/2025/v18i1549.
[2] Isiah Lavender III, *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement*, New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative (Ohio State University Press, 2019), 12.
[3] Ibid., 11.

Baudrillard's four stages of hyperreality, we are hurtling towards the final stage, Simulation, where synthetic Blackness supplants material, cultural, *real* Blackness. This is no longer speculative; it is upon us. I use "synthetic Blackness" here to label the latest trend of Black impersonation and parody through artificial intelligence tools. In other words, synthetic Blackness refers to digitally constructed or AI-generated depictions of Black individuals, primarily on social media. Often, these hyperreal depictions of racialized identity rely on stereotypes, and my particular concern attends to how synthetic renderings of Black women reify damaging narratives about Black femininity. Experiencing the interlocking oppressions of both racism and sexism, Black women face pervasive, multi-faceted stereotypes that diminish their humanity. Public perception of Black women is of critical importance to how American society views itself since, as Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins said, "African-American women's status as outsiders becomes the point from which other groups define their normality."[4] With synthetic Blackness now saturating screens, this paradigm shift complicates how Black women perceive themselves and are perceived. What happens when synthetic media renders real Black women obsolete in AI's optimized hyperreality?

In the following essay, I contend with the proliferation of synthetic Blackness through AI-generated digital blackface and its specific implications for Black women. First, I define misogynoir and elaborate on digital blackface's connection to historical blackface minstrelsy. This Black feminist framework thus establishes AI-generated digital blackface as a new iteration of a centuries-long practice of demeaning Black women through negative media representation. Then, I analyze the OpenAI-powered SNAP misinformation campaign to bring into relief how synthetic media metastasizes anti-Black misogyny.

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[4] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2000), 70.

**Misogynoir in Blackface Minstrelsy, Then & Now**

To grasp the stakes of digital blackface and AI-generated content for Black women, it is crucial to understand the concept of misogynoir. Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey coined the term "misogynoir" in 2008 "to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience, particularly in US visual and digital culture…the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization." Her term is a portmanteau of "misogyny" and "noir," as in the French word for black and the crime genre of film noir. It provides us with the language to name the specific precarity of Black women and the role of media in reinforcing that marginality. In *Misogynoir Transformed*, Bailey discusses how both popular media and digital media propagate misogynoir by mass producing stereotypical representations of Black women. As Bailey argues, these representations shape public perceptions in ways that not only "affect the self-esteem of the populations depicted" but also "materially impact the lives of Black women by justifying poor treatment throughout all areas of society and throughout US history."[5] As one historical example, Bailey points to antebellum America's idea of the Jezebel trope, which portrayed Black women as sexually available, promiscuous, and "unrapeable" in order to justify the sexual exploitation of Black women for forced reproductive labor in the domestic slave trade. Bailey's study of misogynoir in media illuminates how "caricatures and images are able to supersede reality,"[6] an erasure of Black identity now amplified by digital blackface and synthetic media.

Digital blackface, a term popularized by Lauren Michele Jackson, describes non-Black individuals' use of digital media (GIFs, memes, photos, videos, etc.) featuring Black people as a

[5] Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* (New York University Press, 2021), 2–3.
[6] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, 3.

form of expression on social media. Instances of digital blackface can be as (seemingly) innocuous as sharing the Michael Jordan crying gif or as explicitly appropriative as spam accounts posing as Black Trump supporters in 2020.[7] In fact, Jackson specifically highlights the presence of "digital minstrels," non-Black users who co-opt Black profile pictures, African American Vernacular English, and reaction gifs to masquerade as Black individuals, all to manipulate social media discourse.[8] The term digital blackface harkens back to blackface minstrelsy, a theatrical and musical tradition from the early 19th century in which white performers would perform as Black caricatures, darkening their face with burnt cork or shoe polish and wearing exaggerated clothing. The stock characters of blackface minstrelsy entrenched enduring Black stereotypes into the American public consciousness such as the Mammy, an overweight, matronly, and sassy enslaved Black woman, and the Uncle Tom, a gentle, submissive, older enslaved Black man. Blackface minstrelsy served the dual purpose of (1) justifying enslavement by ridiculing the Black community and portraying them as lazy, ignorant, predisposed to vice, and content with their second-class status and (2) generating a wildly popular, cheap entertainment form that further commodified Blackness for white consumption. Importantly, the duration of blackface minstrelsy outlived the institution of slavery; Broadway's last minstrel show did not close until 1909, but amateur and community theater performances lasted through the 1960s.[9]

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[7] Kari Paul, "Twitter Suspends Accounts for Posing as Black Trump Supporters," US News, *The Guardian*, October 13, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/13/twitter-suspends-accounts-for-posing-as-black-trump-supporters.
[8] Lauren Michele Jackson, "We Need to Talk About Digital Blackface in GIFs," Teen Vogue, August 2, 2017, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs.
[9] David Pilgrim, "The Last Minstrel Show in Vermont?," Jim Crow Museum, 2026, https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/question/2026/may2026.htm.

Aside from digital blackface, the legacy of blackface minstrelsy and racial parody persists in contemporary media and culture; in fact, CNN published a list of celebrities who have donned blackface for roles, including Jimmy Fallon and Julianne Hough.[10] While "blacking up" is an overt, visual callback to this era of racial parody, blackface minstrelsy's lasting impact is also apparent in Black media representation through archetypes like the Angry Black Woman and the Black Best Friend. These tropes may not be accompanied by blackface; they may even be portrayed by Black actors. However, they are rooted in antebellum and Jim Crow era caricatures of Black female identity. Collins refers to these contemporary archetypes and their minstrel antecedents as controlling images, or pervasive, socially constructed negative portrayals of Black women that become so deeply embedded in society that they seem "natural, normal, and inevitable."[11] To reframe these stereotypes as controlling images is to acknowledge their potency as ideological tools that exist to erase individuality and to justify the oppression of Black women. For instance, the Black Best Friend in television or film, which descends from the Mammy archetype, reinforces a one-dimensional view of Black womanhood since the character mainly exists to support her white counterpart as a plucky sidekick, wise confidante, or sassy comic relief. Reckoning with these controlling images is not merely a question of "what is good representation," but rather a study of how structural misogynoir is produced and reproduced through narrative and the material effects of its circulation. An important feature of controlling images that Collins highlights is their mutability.[12] These stereotypes are not static; they are constantly in flux to bolster the present anti-Black narrative. My analysis contends that the

[10] Doug Criss, "Virginia Isn't a One-off. Here's a (Growing) List of Celebs and Lawmakers Who Got in Trouble over Blackface," CNN, February 7, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/07/us/celebrities-in-blackface-list-trnd.
[11] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 5.
[12] Ibid., 72.

proliferation of synthetic Blackness fully harnesses the pliability of controlling images to inflict maximum damage to Black women.

Understanding the history of blackface minstrelsy and controlling images illuminates the stakes of digital blackface, where cosplaying Blackness becomes more accessible and less distinguishable from reality due to the online setting. Hiding behind profile pictures, non-Black users can employ race to impersonate Black individuals, specifically Black women. Notwithstanding digital minstrels purposefully obscuring their racial identity, I argue that even posting a Black GIF or meme as a non-Black user reinforces Blackness as synonymous with entertainment value. One need not be trying to fully embody Blackness in order to perpetuate this harmful narrative. One major reckoning with digital blackface occurred in June 2014 with the #EndFathersDay hoax. At the time, freelance writer Shafiqah Hudson noticed a surge of self-proclaimed Black feminists on Twitter (now X) calling to eradicate the holiday. Hudson was immediately suspicious of the incendiary tweets, i.e. "#EndFathersDay because I'm tired of all these white women stealing our good black mens."[13] According to Hudson, neither she nor other online Black feminists could verify the individuals behind these accounts with incredulous handles like "@NayNayCantStop, @LatrineWatts, and @CisHate, and bios like 'Queer + black + angry.'" While Hudson, I'Nasah Crockett, Michelle Taylor (aka Feminista Jones) and other Black feminists saw this orchestrated trolling for the deception it was, they also "watched a credulous rage build online, not just against these fake Twitter accounts but against the black feminists she called friends." A hyperreal Black womanhood was replacing their lived reality. These bad-faith, minstrel performances of militant Black feminism fomented negative animus towards the movement, portraying Black women as angry and misandrist.

[13] Rachelle Hampton, "The Black Feminists Who Saw the Alt-Right Threat Coming," *Slate*, April 23, 2019, https://slate.com/technology/2019/04/black-feminists-alt-right-twitter-gamergate.html.

To expose the trolls, Hudson started the counter-hashtag #YourSlipIsShowing, eventually identifying hundreds of spam accounts as the hashtag gained traction. Before long, Crockett uncovered the initial 4chan post that inspired the misinformation campaign and a broader conspiracy among men's rights activists to purposefully sow division in the feminist movement through #EndFathersDay. In light of Gamergate and the 2016 election, Crockett stated in 2019 that she felt like "a canary in a coal mine" given her activism against trolls in 2014.[14] One might wonder what she must think now.

**The Rise & Fall of Sora: A Digital Blackface Case Study**

Digital blackface has, in turn, paved the way for synthetic, or AI-generated, media to further manipulate how Blackness is constructed, interacted with, and perceived on the internet. The phenomenon we face today is more advanced and insidious than the digital blackface of the #EndFathersDay. For #YourSlipIsShowing, Hudson easily identified specific tells in users' tweets, proclaiming "Anybody with half the sense God gave a cold bowl of oatmeal could see that these weren't feminist sentiments."[15] Again, she and others exposed hundreds of spam accounts, noting the misuse of African American Vernacular English and extremist rhetoric as clear giveaways. They were able to pierce and unravel the hyperreality constructed by the digital minstrels. However, with believable AI-generated media that sync sound and image, the hyperreality becomes considerably more convincing. The controlling images have now come to life. Innovations in generative AI further blur the line between user and persona to the point where it can be unclear, even to a Black viewer, whether the depicted persona is a real person or not.

[14] Ibid.
[15] Penelope Green, "Shafiqah Hudson, Who Fought Trolls on Social Media, Dies at 46," U.S., The New York Times, March 5, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/05/us/shafiqah-hudson-dead.html.

On September 30, 2025, OpenAI released Sora 2, a groundbreaking video generation model that boasted "more physically accurate, realistic, and more controllable" with "synchronized dialogue and sound effects." The initial press release by the Sora team reveled in the model's capability "to do things that are exceptionally difficult—and in some instances outright impossible—for prior video generation models: Olympic gymnastics routines, backflips on a paddleboard that accurately model the dynamics of buoyancy and rigidity, and triple axels while a cat holds on for dear life," including examples of each feat on the webpage. Sora 2, they hoped, "will bring us closer to simulating reality."[16] At the same time, OpenAI also launched the IOS app Sora, where users could experiment with the new model in a social media setting. Through this launch, OpenAI enabled users to generate hyperrealistic videos of whatever they wanted from a one-sentence prompt for as little as $0.10 per second.[17] Little did they know (or admit), suddenly granting the public the power to simulate any reality imaginable would quickly usher in negative and harmful consequences.

OpenAI immediately faced backlash for its controversial opt-out copyright policy, which allowed users to generate videos with copyright materials (including characters and celebrity likeness) unless the rights holders objected.[18] In response, the Motion Picture Association, SAG-AFTRA, Warner Bros. Discovery, and multiple talent agencies publicly criticized OpenAI's policies as contradicting longstanding legal precedents for intellectual property and

[16] Sora Team, "Sora 2 Is Here," OpenAI, September 30, 2025, https://openai.com/index/sora-2/.
[17] "Sora 2 Prompting Guide," OpenAI Developers, accessed October 31, 2026, https://developers.openai.com/cookbook/examples/sora/sora2_prompting_guide; "Sora 2 Pricing (Discontinued, API Shut Down 2026)," October 27, 2025, https://costgoat.com/pricing/sora.
[18] Keach Hagey et al., "OpenAI's New Sora Video Generator to Require Copyright Holders to Opt Out," Tech, *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2025, https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/openais-new-sora-video-generator-to-require-copyright-holders-to-opt-out-071d8b2a.

appropriate compensation.[19] While OpenAI increased guardrails to block the unauthorized use of a celebrity's likeness by October 20,[20] this policy change did not cover deceased celebrities, such as Robin Williams, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Michael Jackson. OpenAI only banned the usage of Dr. King's likeness after significant backlash from his family and estate,[21] and by that time, Sora users had already generated videos of the civil rights leader " saying crude, offensive or racist things…stealing from a grocery store, speeding away from police."[22] This casual disrespect of King's legacy exposes how synthetic media further commodifies Black bodies as sources of entertainment, even after death. These other case studies without a doubt warrant further analysis as we continue to contend with intellectual property, copyright infringement, and AI ethics, but for the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the specific usage of Sora 2 to generate misogynoiristic depictions of Black women.

Further complicating Sora 2's ethical implications, OpenAI's advancement in synthetic video generation coincided with the longest government shutdown in US history, resulting in unprecedented disruptions to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) distribution.[23] This pernicious combination of unregulated generative AI and stiff political tensions resulted in an onslaught of racist, synthetic media reinforcing damaging stereotypes about Black women on

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[19] Wendy Lee and Samantha Masunaga, "Hollywood-AI Battle Deepens, as OpenAI and Studios Clash over Copyrights and Consent," Hollywood Inc., *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2025, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2025-10-11/hollywood-ai-battle-heats-up-sora 2-openai-sam-altman.
[20] SAG-AFTRA, "SAG-AFTRA, OpenAI, Bryan Cranston Collaborate to Ensure Voice and Likeness Protections in Sora 2," SAG-AFTRA, October 20, 2025, https://www.sagaftra.org/sag-aftra-openai-bryan-cranston-collaborate-ensure-voice-and-likeness-protectio ns-sora-2.
[21] OpenAI Newsroom (@OpenAINewsroom), "Statement from OpenAI and King Estate, Inc.," Tweet, October 16, 2025, https://x.com/OpenAINewsroom/status/1979005850166648933.
[22] Bobby Allyn, "OpenAI Blocks MLK Jr. Videos on Sora after 'Disrespectful Depictions,'" Technology, *NPR*, October 17, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/10/17/nx-s1-5577869/sora-block-videos-mlk.
[23] Elizabeth L. Adams et al., "SNAP Recipients' Experiences during the 2025 Government Shutdown: Implications for Food Access," *Frontiers in Public Health* 14 (2026): 1812321, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2026.1812321.

government assistance. According to a report by Washington et al., these videos on TikTok, Instagram, etc., "predominantly depicted Black women arguing with retail employees about their benefits, stealing from grocery stores, or boasting about receiving public assistance while unemployed."[24] This article's writers reported encountering videos with not thousands, but *millions* of views. The videos recycled incendiary scripts featuring photorealistic Black women yelling at the year "this is your responsibility as the taxpayer to support me and my six babies."[25] One such video, originally posted by TikTok account @impossible_asmr, depicts a scowling Black woman in the foreground with her children and an unkempt living room behind her—no Sora logo or AI disclaimer to be seen (Figure 1). A cursory look through TikTok's search engine reveals hundreds of recorded responses to this video as if it were authentic. One repost of this content included several comments criticizing the AI-generated woman, saying "She probably doesn't remember who [the fathers] are," "I think they should be a limit on how many kids you can have if you're using government help," and "Why's she yelling."[26]

A *New York Times* article covered vitriolic responses to another AI-generated video showing a Black woman seemingly admitting to selling food stamps (Figure 2). Viewers rushed to frame this singular instance as evidence of widespread abuse of government assistance with comments like "Yep fraud! This is what is happening! Cut the food stamps!" and "This system is

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[24] Irving Washington et al., "Fake AI-Generated Videos Perpetuate Stereotypes About SNAP Recipients, And New KFF Poll Looks at Belief in the False Claim That Undocumented Immigrants Are Eligible for ACA Coverage," *KFF* 35 (November 2025), https://www.kff.org/health-information-trust/fake-ai-generated-videos-perpetuate-stereotypes-about-snap-recipients-and-new-kff-poll-looks-at-belief-in-the-false-claim-that-undocumented-immigrants-are-eligible-for-aca-coverage/.

[25] Isaac Hayes III (@isaachayes3), "OpenAI's SORA 2 Continues to Let Videos Be Made That Mock and Disrespect Black People," Instagram video, November 3, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/isaachayes3/reel/DQk8uQWDI8_/.

[26] (@neurodivergent_nate), "EBT crashout," TikTok video, October 24, 2025, https://www.tiktok.com/@neurodivergent_nate/video/7564913683936120119.

corrupted. She could go get a job like the rest of us!!"[27] Through synthetic media, the overrepresentation of Black women not using but *abusing* government benefits affirms a distorted view of reality that positions this group as social burdens leeching off of law-abiding taxpayers. In the process, these videos reinforce two insidious controlling images of Black women: the Angry Black Woman and the Welfare Queen.




Figure 1. An AI-generated Black woman chastises the viewer for not supporting her children, from

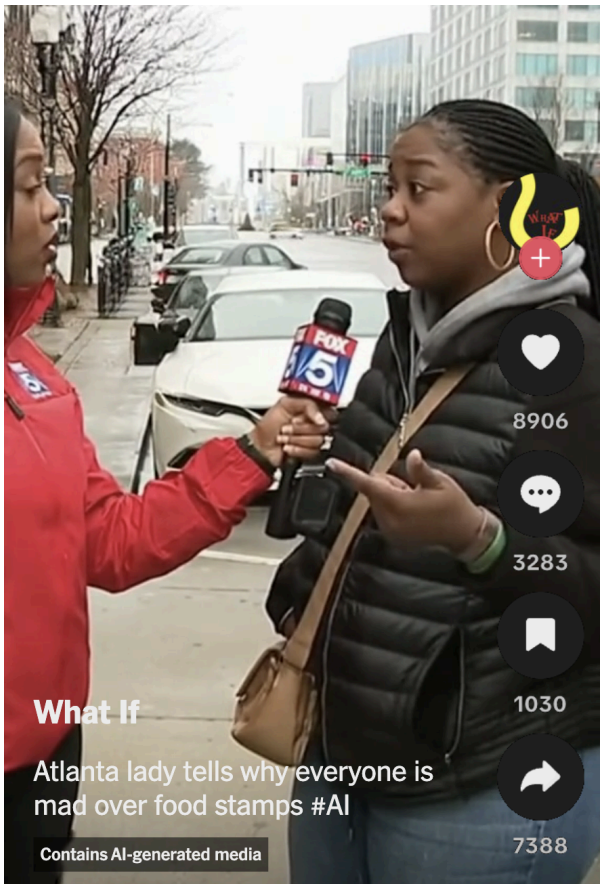


Figure 2. An AI-generated Black woman admits to illegally selling food stamps, from "A.I. Videos

[27] Steven Lee Myers and Stuart A. Thompson, "A.I. Videos Have Flooded Social Media. No One Was Ready.," Technology, *The New York Times*, December 8, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/08/technology/ai-slop-sora-social-media.html.

"OpenAI's SORA 2 Continues to Let Videos Be Made That Mock and Disrespect Black People," by Isaac Hayes III (2025), Instagram video.

Have Flooded Social Media," by Steven Lee Myers and Stuart A. Thompson, (*The New York Times*, 2025).

The Angry Black Woman is a controlling image that characterizes Black women as full of spite, sass, and rage. She was first popularized in modern American culture by the character Sapphire Stevens in the *Amos 'n' Andy* franchise, a radio show and sitcom running from the early to mid-20th century. In the sitcom, Sapphire, portrayed by Ernestine Wade, often scolded her scheming husband George "Kingfish" Stevens, a dynamic which began to solidify the idea of Black women as emasculating and overbearing. In short, as Bailey puts it, Sapphire was "a loud and angry Black woman, impossible to satisfy, irrational with rage, and completely outside appropriate (read: white) femininity."[28] This controlling image evolved into the Angry Black Woman (ABW), "a shrill nagger with irrational states of anger and indignation…often mean-spirited and abusive. Although African American men are her primary targets, she has venom for anyone who insults or disrespects her."[29] This controlling image pathologizes the Black woman's emotions by portraying her expression of frustration, passion, and anger as defective, irrational, and illogical. The ABW naturalizes inordinate rage as an inherent trait of Black women in order to justify the interpersonal and systemic dismissal of their normal, human reactions to stress, conflict, and injustice. The prevalence of the ABW also discourages Black women from expressing negative criticism or emotions out of fear of being labeled as irrationally angry. In these Sora 2 videos, the Black women's screams of indignation not only reinforce this harmful caricature; they bring her into (hyper)reality. This proliferation of misogynoir through

[28] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, 39.
[29] "The Sapphire Caricature," accessed October 31, 2026, https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/antiblack/sapphire.htm.

synthetic means amplifies the noise Black women must cut through in order to be recognized as human beings.

Another controlling image invoked by these videos is the Welfare Queen. Starting in the 1970s, the Reagan administration and mainstream media convinced the American public that the transgressions of one Black woman, Linda Taylor, who defrauded the welfare system of $8,000, exposed a whole community's propensity to exploit government assistance. This rhetoric coalesced into the construct of the Welfare Queen (WQ), "an irresponsible Black woman who was having kids and getting rich from government checks" who "got a 'handout' for having lots of children and being unmarried."[30] The Sora videos reanimate this decades-old narrative, portraying Black women as unapologetically reckless and exploitative. In the SNAP misinformation campaign, the AI-generated Welfare Queens proclaim that their lack of food and money during the government shutdown is "your," the viewer's, "fault." In what appears to be a man-on-the-street interview (Figure 3), one Black woman brags to an offscreen interviewer, "When I get older, shoot, I wanna have like 20 baby daddies. They all gonna pay me child support. I get my EBT, I'm set." When the offscreen voice asks, "Why don't you just get a job?" the woman yells back at her: "Oh hahaha no! I know you didn't say that."[31] Leaning into the WQ controlling image, this exchange presents Black women as gleefully manipulating individual men and welfare systems at the expense of public and personal responsibility.

These words, their ardent delivery, and the hyperrealistic visuals all work together to foment misogynoiristic suspicions about Black women on welfare. Importantly, this controlling image has material impacts. In *Misogynoir Transformed*, Bailey explicitly links the WQ to the

[30] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, 7.
[31] Isaac Hayes III (@isaachayes3), "OpenAI's SORA 2 Continues to Let Videos Be Made That Mock and Disrespect Black People," Instagram video, November 3, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/isaachayes3/reel/DQk8uQWDI8_/.

passage of The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, which "overhauled the welfare system by creating time limits for the use of assistance as well as work and marriage requirements…all designed to re-engineer Black women's perceived dependence on the welfare state."[32] In late 2025, the SNAP misinformation campaign was clearly leveraging the WQ to quell outrage over the government shutdown. By mocking those receiving SNAP benefits, these synthetic content creators were disincentivizing the public from fighting for uninterrupted support of government assistance. Data confirms that these AI-generated videos significantly stray from the truth. Black Americans comprise just 27% of adult SNAP recipients, most recipients between the ages of 16 and 59 must meet work requirements to remain eligible, and instances of SNAP fraud are rarities.[33] However, this reality is not as sensational as the hyperreality of these Sora videos.

Similar to the #EndFathersDay hoax, these AI-generated videos replicate misogynoiristic rhetoric through digital blackface, but the difference is that the hyperrealism of Sora 2 "give these myths new visual 'evidence,' as the technology makes it easier to create seemingly authentic testimonials that confirm existing biases."[34] In other words, synced visual and audio can amplify false narratives in ways text alone cannot, powerfully disseminating synthetic Blackness for mass consumption. These videos readily validate racial bias of viewers who, out of ignorance and/or malice, would sooner believe the depiction than question its veracity. In fact, at the peak of this misinformation trend, *Fox News* ran an article that presented the videos as

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[32] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, 7.
[33] Drew DeSilver, "What the Data Says about Food Stamps in the U.S.," Federal Government, *Pew Research Center*, November 14, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/11/14/what-the-data-says-about-food-stamps-in-the-us/; USDA, "SNAP Work Requirements | Food and Nutrition Administration," Food and Nutrition Administration, July 16, 2026, https://www.fna.usda.gov/snap/work-requirements.
[34] Washington et al., "Fake AI-Generated Videos Perpetuate Stereotypes About SNAP Recipients, And New KFF Poll Looks at Belief in the False Claim That Undocumented Immigrants Are Eligible for ACA Coverage."

authentic, even including commentary by conservative politicians, before issuing major corrections.[35]

**Conclusion: Optimization for Whom?**

In the end, it was financial cost, not ethical concerns, that prompted Sora's downfall. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Sora proved unprofitable,[36] resulting in OpenAI discontinuing its website and application experiences on April 26, 2026 and its API a few months thereafter.[37] However, the shuttering of Sora did not bring the end of AI-generated digital blackface. Instead, Sora 2 accelerated an already existing phenomenon that has persisted and diversified. For future research, I would like to expand this article to cover the use of synthetic Blackness to monetize social media content. Specifically, my interest lies in AI influencers and accounts posing as Black independent business owners that successfully dupe millions of users, even Black ones. The popularity of Black AI influencers like Nia Noir, who gained over three million TikTok followers in less than one month,[38] raises questions about how AI optimizes the commodification of Black femininity. Regarding the fabricated Black small business accounts, this digital minstrelsy reveals a different mode of exploitation, where scammers co-opt the experiences of struggling Black business to redirect traffic to dropshipping sites. One such example opens with a Black woman in tears, the onscreen text reading "even as a Black woman, I still believe white women will stay 12 seconds to save my failing lobster bag business."[39] These flagrant attempts to

[35] Alba Cuebas-Fantauzzi,"SNAP beneficiaries threaten to ransack stores over government shutdown," Fox News, October 31, 2025, https://archive.ph/NL6oR.
[36] Berber Jin and Jessica Toonkel, "Exclusive | The Sudden Fall of OpenAI's Most Hyped Product Since ChatGPT," Tech, *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/the-sudden-fall-of-openais-most-hyped-product-since-chatgpt-64c730c9.
[37] "What to Know about the Sora Discontinuation," OpenAI Help Center, accessed October 31, 2026, https://help.openai.com/en/articles/20001152-what-to-know-about-the-sora-discontinuation.
[38] "Nia Noir • 800+ Reels on Instagram," accessed November 1, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/popular/nia-noir/.
[39] (@Holixhoods). "Shop now - link in bio." Tiktok video, March 26, 2026, https://www.tiktok.com/@shopholix_com/video/7621476626873748758.

manipulate well-intentioned consumers reduce Black women to commercial props. In addition to the SNAP misinformation videos, these uses of synthetic Blackness should alert us to the destructive possibilities of AI-generated media. As synthetic media improves and proliferates, a Black feminist stance may be the best defense to keep these warped perceptions from becoming our reality.

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