



TikTok and the Evolution of Digital Blackface

TikTok's irresistible draw and optimization of happiness masks deeper issues. As it grows to over 800 million users, it mirrors the world's prejudices. Black creators face muted posts, in-app harassment, and racism, revealing a place tangled in blurred visions and youthful ignorances, where flattery turns into mockery and theft.

Black Creators' Experiences on TikTok

Censorship

Black creators report posts being muted without explanation, often after addressing racial issues or expressing solidarity. This censorship stifles their voices and limits their reach on the platform.

Harassment

Many Black users encounter in-app harassment, including racist comments, slurs, and monkey emojis. Despite community guidelines, such behavior often goes unchecked by TikTok.

Digital Blackface

Non-Black creators engage in digital blackface, mimicking Black mannerisms and slang for clout. This twisted love of Black culture through caricature perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

The Allure and Impact of Vine

Black Ingenuity

Vine's allure traced to Black creators' ingenuity, making irresistible content.

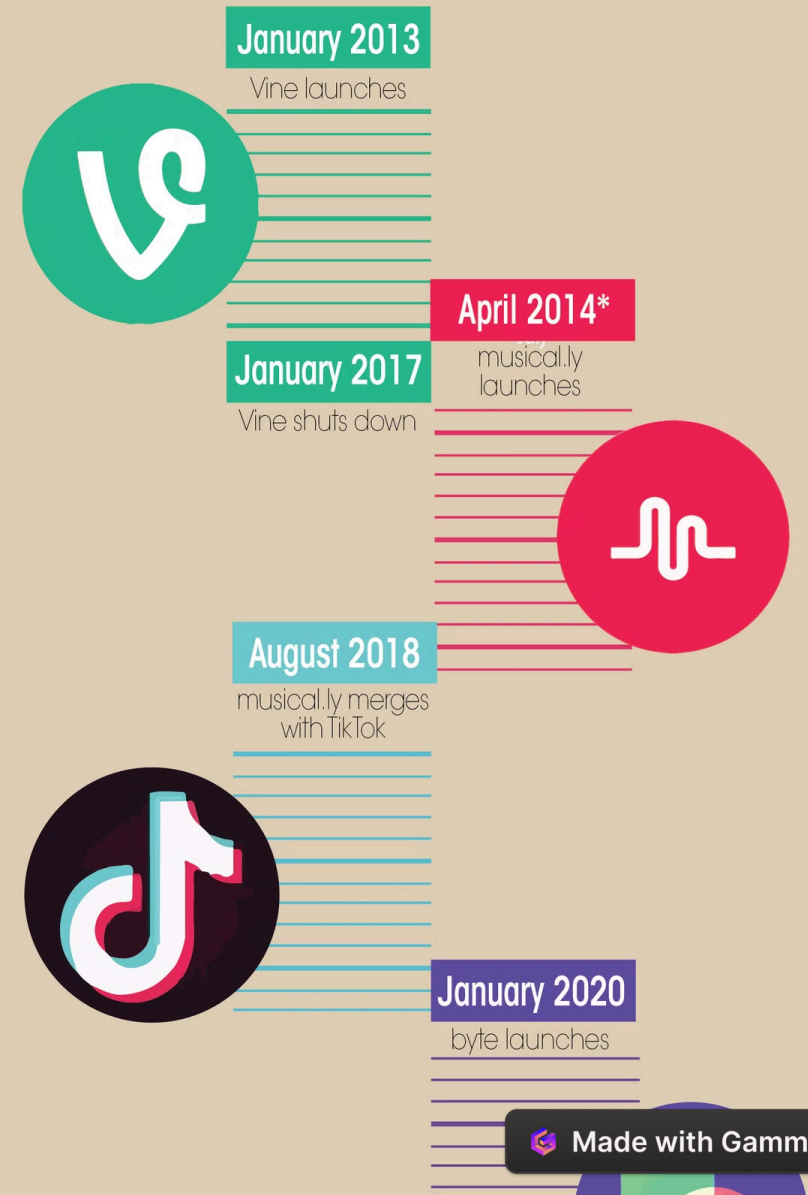
Cultural Engine

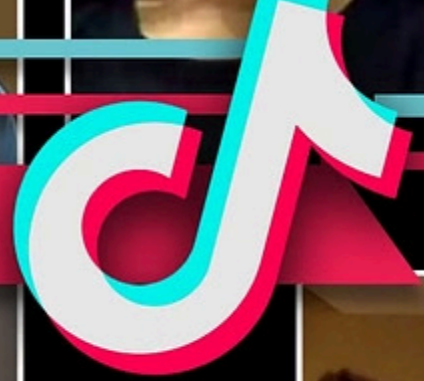
From 2014-2016, Vine became the dominant engine of Black culture on the internet, rivaling Twitter in incubating trends.

Mainstreaming Slang

Vine mainstreamed Black slang, like "on fleek," influencing culture.

Here's a look at how Vine and similar video apps have appeared and disappeared over the years.





TikTok Creators

TikTok's Rise and Generous Algorithm



Generous Algorithm

TikTok's algorithm allows users with no following to gain millions of views.



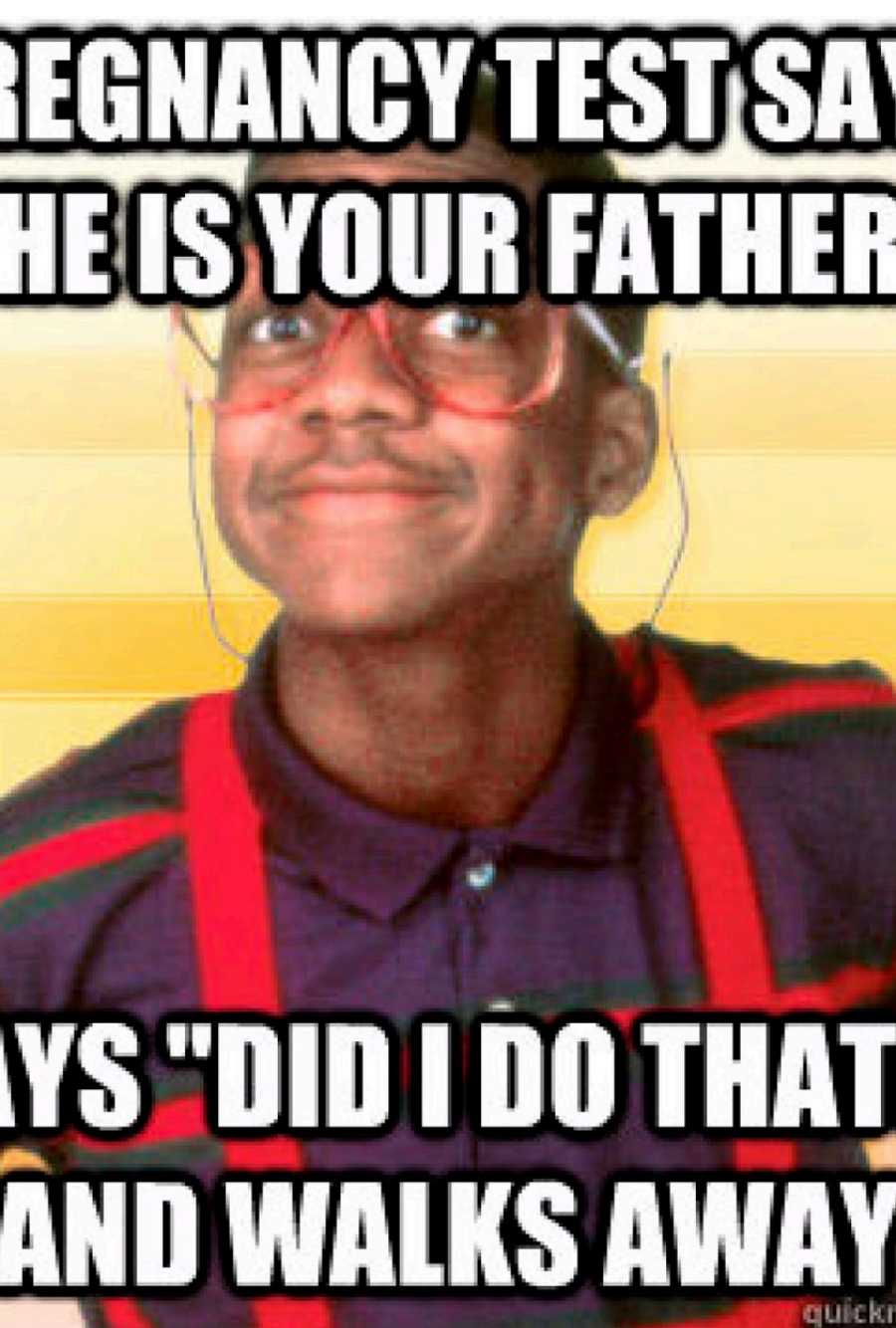
Dance Challenges

Chart-topping rap songs provide the soundtrack to weekly dance challenges.



Breakout Artists

Lil Nas X is the app's first breakout artist, and Tabitha Brown is a recognized pedagogue.



Digital Blackface: A Twisted Love of Black Culture

Caricature

Disturbing content suggests a twisted love of Black culture through caricature.

Race-Obsessed

Blackmon notes many teenagers are "race-obsessed," turning Blackness into a show.

Low-Key Racism

User Mia Brier calls it "low-key racism," where ugliness becomes clear over time.



Minstrelsy Thrives on TikTok

1

Early Iterations

American minstrelsy emerged in the 1840s, enduring for over a century.

2

Stock Characters

White people darkened skin, performing musical acts and comedy sketches relying on stock characters.

3

Modern Tenets

Lauren Michele Jackson notes minstrel tenets remain alive in media and the internet.

The Hot Cheeto Girl and Racial Stereotypes

1

Cultural Distortion

The Hot Cheeto Girl meme exemplifies how marginalized people are subtly debased.

2

Troubling History

Whitney Roberts notes the trend's history, calling it a derivative of the ghetto girl or hood rat.

3

Open Question

TikTok permits impersonations for "parody" or "commentary," but how broadly it interprets blackface is an open question.

i love that all the "retired hot Cheetos girls" under this trend are just yt girls admitting they were just adopting a caricature of Black and Latina women. Do yt gay guys next.



The #HowMyForm Challenge and Racial Mockery

Degrading Stereotypes

Almost every #HowMyForm video played on degrading stereotypes of various groups.



Three-Act Structure

Videos use a three-act structure, ending with the question "How's my form?"

Insidious Satire

Some videos satirize slavery, with creators pretending to pick cotton.

Black Creators Face Muted Posts and Harassment





The Future of Images and Blackness on TikTok

800M+

Users

TikTok has over 800 million users, making it a powerful platform.

AI

AI Analyst

TikTok hired an AI policy analyst to focus on racial bias in algorithms.

Fall

Feedback

The company will check in with Black creators again in early fall for feedback.