"MISS RONA IS REALLY CLAPPING THE WHITE SUPREMACISTS": BLACK TWITTER'S POLITICAL HUMOR IN COVID-19 TIMES

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As has been widely reported, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately sickened and killed Black Americans. At the same time, however, there is a significant body of conversation on Black Twitter that jokes about the pandemic. This includes tweets that nickname the pandemic as Miss Rona," as in "god i need a drink so bad, miss rona i promise i will be good." As previous research has shown, Black online practices are "libidinal" (Brock, Jr. 2020) or expressive of affect (Lu and Steele 2019). In particular, Black online practices (Brock, Jr. 2020; Lu and Steele 2019), Black humor (Haggins 2007), and the intersection of the two (Monk-Payton 2017) are all forms of group interaction that encompass both joy and pain, moments rooted in pleasure but also a "response to social, political, and economic realities of oppression" (Haggins 2007, 13). Through an analysis of tweets using the "Miss Rona" nickname, we examine how Black Twitter humor serves as a site of political critique of both public policy failures in the COVID-19 pandemic and the Trump administration more broadly, with users leveraging practices like Signifyin' (Gates, Jr 1989), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and wordplay to resist legibility by outsiders as they orient toward their own community.

Methods
To make sense of this cultural phenomenon, we collected tweets for the phrase "Miss Rona" between October 6 and October 9, 2020 using the Twitter Archiving Google Sheet (Hawksey n.d.). The search terms was selected after a preliminary survey of Black Twitter conversation about COVID-19, as a phrase that was not widely used in other Twitter enclaves in order to limit false positives (Florini 2019). We collected a total of 3798 tweets for "Miss Rona." We then removed instances of retweets from the data set before calculating word frequency using Orange to gain a broad overview of the data (Demšar et al. 2013). We subsequently took a random sample of 100 tweets for initial qualitative analysis. Though retweets were removed in order to not skew these two methods, we also counted the quantity of retweets to create a sample of the most popular posts. The two authors coded the random and most popular samples

independently for major themes, and then discussed to reach consensus about both the themes and to identify the keywords representative of the themes. Those keywords were then searched in the full body of tweets to create corpuses of tweets for each of three themes: references to political figures, direct addresses to Miss Rona, and projections of the future. These three corpuses were then closely read for patterns in how users humorously engaged with both the coronavirus and the political landscape.

Findings
Our examination of Black Twitter's "Miss Rona" tweets revealed that one of the key themes was a connection of the virus to the broader political moment within a heavily critical, but humorous dialogue.

In October 2020, when our tweets were collected, many members of the Trump administration had recently been diagnosed with COVID-19, which was widely viewed in light of the then-president's downplaying of the pandemic. Black Twitter used forms of Signyfin' to engage with and critique the political climate, headed by the then-president Donald Trump, that had politicized the COVID-19 pandemic making minority groups more likely to contract and die from the virus. Many of the "Miss Rona" tweets originating from Black Twitter used humor to express outrage as the African American community disproportionately suffered the consequences of Donald Trump's inaction at the beginning of the pandemic.

The tweets showed the ways Black humor is political commentary that resonates with the Black community, addressing or referring to Black trauma during the pandemic: dealing with continued racial violence, increased public visibility of white supremacist ideology, and medical disparities based on race. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) featured heavily in the tweets we examined as Black Twitter used the hybrid dialect to circumvent Twitter's 240 character limit and to invoke the speech intonation unique to Black communicative and cultural practices.

The tweets are also expressions of Black Twitter catharsis (joy despite pain) through witty one-sided Twitter banters that skillfully and playfully engage with the social and political climate. While the tweets may seem trivial on the surface, correct and full knowledge of their meaning is dependent upon an authentic Black experience. The tweets we examined epitomize Twitter as a counterpublic digital space where Black people avoid respectability politics, engaging with political and social issues within their communicative traditions and culture, to which the white gaze is irrelevant.

Conclusion
Through examining these tweets, which appear to make light of a pandemic that has disproportionately sickened and killed Black Americans, we consider how these conversations go beyond laughing to keep from crying to coded political statements and cultural alliance. We conceptualize Signifyin' as a Black cultural technology with affordances such as humor, misdirection, and double meaning that enables Black Twitter users to not only perform their racial identity, but also leverage humor to comment on political and social reality. Twitter's affordances, such as its "Trending" feature, allow Black users to digitally gather around a conversation as they would at the barbershop or corner store sharing cultural and political commentary that is powerful

because of its collective participation and reach. While Black Twitter is not a monolith nor it is a singular representation of all Black people, the "Miss Rona" tweets demonstrate a shared cultural, communicative practice and response to oppressive policies and actions that devastate the Black community in real life. We argue that Black Twitter's jokes about the collective trauma of COVID-19 is a resource for online camaraderie, cultural critique, and community affiliation.

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