# Graphika

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The Graphika Team

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# IRA in Ghana: Double Deceit

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## Executive Summary

On March 12, 2020, CNN, Twitter, [Facebook](#), Graphika, and two professors from Clemson University[1] exposed a cross-platform influence operation on social media that was run from Ghana but targeted Black communities in the United States. These organizations assessed that the operation, which was still in the early stages of building its audience, was linked to a Ghanaian NGO ostensibly focused on human rights, but ultimately traceable to Russia. Facebook attributed the operation to "individuals associated with past activity by the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA)."

Partners involved in the discovery and assessment of this campaign shared the pages and accounts they had found with Graphika. In parallel, CNN investigated on the ground in Ghana and interviewed members of the NGO, some of whom appeared not to have realized that they were working for a foreign influence operation. The operation's managers appear to have tried to deceive their own staff as well as American internet users; for that reason, we have dubbed this operation "Double Deceit."

The operation began around June 2019. It featured accounts across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, some of them apparently authentic personal accounts belonging to the NGO's employees; other pages claimed to be of nonexistent organizations or generic issue-focused accounts. The posts on these accounts combined positive and uplifting messages on issues such as black pride, beauty, and heritage with political posts about racism, oppression, and police violence against the black community in the United States. The operation did not systematically comment on the 2020 US presidential election: posts targeting candidates and campaigns seldom appear in this set.

The operation did not create much original content; instead, it primarily borrowed content from elsewhere online, especially memes that were already popular online. Operators appeared to have had access to a shared stock of memes and images that they used repeatedly across different accounts; some of those memes matched posts made by the original IRA in 2016-2017. They

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[1] Darren Linvill and Patrick Warren deserve great credit for their long and attentive examination of the IRA's previous campaigns, which led them to identify suspicious networked activity, providing the first link in the investigative chain. We are grateful for both their academic and investigative contributions on this topic.

posted those against popular hashtags, notably #blackhistorymonth, which they used consistently from July through March (Black History Month is in February).

The operation focused strongly on using positive images of women to create an online following for these accounts. Many of the accounts dealt with black women's beauty; many posts featured children, especially girls. The main political themes woven throughout these posts touch upon racism and police violence in the United States. LGBTQ+ rights issues and accounts also featured regularly throughout this set, with a number of accounts solely dedicated to this theme.

Overall, the operation did not have a large following online. Facebook estimated that the 69 pages on its platform had just 13,500 followers. The 85 Instagram accounts performed better, with some 265,000 followers combined.[2] On Twitter, the 71 accounts identified by the platform as part of this operation totaled just under 68,500 followers.

Individual posts, however, did perform well: a handful of uplifting and positive posts went viral, gathering tens of thousands of likes and shares. These posts were not rooted in divisive or political themes but showed the operators' ability to identify and repost viral content and thus to reach a significant audience.

This operation highlights a few important lessons regarding the evolution of foreign influence campaigns.

The operation used authentic activists and users, fronted by an ostensible human rights NGO, to covertly propagate an influence campaign. It is not the first time such an attempt has been made, but the tactic is of concern. The unwitting individuals co-opted into the operation bear the risk of reputational or legal jeopardy; indeed, CNN reported that the Ghanaian operation was raided by law enforcement as a result of their online activities. For the human rights community, the risk is that genuine NGOs may be misidentified as being involved in influence operations by accident or malice, and there is also the danger of tarnishing the reputation of important work and organizations across the field.

Second, the use of apparently unwitting employees changes the operation's investigative profile. The resulting accounts were not the traditional "fake profiles" of personas, with made-up names and stolen faces: this further complicated the discovery process. On the other hand, account operators often left geographic indicators on their posts: while posting about the US, they would at times geo-localize in the suburbs of Accra, and many of the pages were visibly being managed in Ghana. The operation was deceptive, but not in the way more usually associated with troll operations. This is an area where further research and investigation would be valuable.

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[2] Follower numbers are not a sound metric to assess an operation's influence on their own, but it is instructive to compare the combined totals outlined above with the IRA's most followed Instagram account in 2016. This was @sincerely_black_, which had 198,000 followers.

Third, the operation confirms the evolving targeting of the United States in general, and the black community in particular,[3] by people associated with the IRA. Although the themes and some of the content remained the same, Operation Double Deceit's tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) were notably different from those we documented in 2016.[4] Responding to information operations requires careful examination of historical patterns, combined with a focus on the latest TTPs appearing throughout newly exposed campaigns.

Finally, Double Deceit's exposure shows how far the operational research community has evolved since 2016. Researchers at Clemson University and Facebook's investigators identified the operation in parallel but complementary ways; CNN investigated on the ground. Both Facebook and Twitter worked with the research community to assess the scale of the operation. This degree of cooperation and co-investigation is a positive evolution and would not have been possible in 2016.

While information operations on social media have evolved, so have our collective defense capabilities. As major events, including the US 2020 presidential election and the coronavirus pandemic, continue to generate opportunities to sow discord and disinformation, it will be important to further strengthen cooperation within the operational research community to create the best outcomes for exposing influence operations before they can become viral themselves.

# Background

On March 12, 2020, [Facebook](Facebook) and Twitter announced that they had suspended accounts and pages linked to an influence operation that originated in Ghana but was linked to people associated with the Russian IRA. Simultaneously, and acting on a tip-off from researchers at Clemson University, CNN reported on its own months-long investigation, including interviews with some of the individuals involved.

Twitter said, "The accounts — operating out of Ghana and Nigeria and which we can reliably associate with Russia — attempted to sow discord by engaging in conversations about social issues, like race and civil rights. This activity did not exclusively favor any one candidate or any one ideological position."

Facebook said the operation "was operated by local nationals — some wittingly and some unwittingly — in Ghana and Nigeria on behalf of individuals in Russia." They used real and fake accounts to manage pages "posing as non-government organizations or personal blogs. (…)

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[3] For context of Russian active measures targeting American racial tensions and black activists, see Thomas Rid's upcoming book: "Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare," Farrar, Straus and Giroux (April 21, 2020).

[4] See Graphika's previous report for the US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, co-authored with colleagues at the Oxford Internet Institute:
https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2018/12/IRA-Report-2018.pdf.

Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their purpose and coordination, our investigation found links to EBLA, an NGO in Ghana, and individuals associated with past activity by the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA)."

In its attribution, Facebook said that the network "was linked to the activity we had previously removed and attributed to the IRA in April 2018, July 2018 and November 2018." In April 2018, Facebook took down an IRA operation that mainly targeted Ukraine. In July 2018, the platform took down an IRA operation that targeted a range of communities in the United States, including Black Americans, Native Americans, and feminists. In November 2018, following a tip-off from US law enforcement, Facebook and Twitter took down IRA accounts that targeted the midterm elections and posed as racial, political, or social groups, from Black Americans and LGBTQ groups to gun-rights groups and southern conservatives.

This linkage places Double Deceit firmly in the genealogy of IRA operations.[5] The way it used real and apparently unwitting individuals from Ghana also resembles earlier Russian influence operations. The IRA in 2016-2017 recruited real, unwitting Americans to help organize election rallies. In October 2019, Facebook exposed an Africa-based operation attributed to associates of Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, the funder of the IRA, that hired local nationals to post some of its content. A Stanford Internet Observatory white paper analyzed this activity in the Central African Republic, Libya, and Sudan, among others.

As such, Double Deceit represents an evolution, rather than a revolution, in activity by an actor marked by its persistence. According to CNN, after Twitter took down the operation's accounts at the end of February 2020, the Russia-based individual behind Double Deceit told his employees to create new accounts and keep on posting. The research and investigative community will continue monitoring for further activity.

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[5] We are updating the Information Operations Archive's website with the archival data of these operations to allow and encourage the study of their evolution: www.io-archive.org

# The Operation

## The Assets

Operation Double Deceit primarily leveraged accounts and pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and used its posts to attract user engagement on the platforms themselves. Although the ostensible Ghanaian NGO at the center of the operation did maintain a website in its name, the social media operators did not try to drive users toward it. This approach is reminiscent of most of the IRA's previous operations[6] and distinct from many other known information operations from countries such as Russia, Iran, and the Gulf States, which used social media to drive users toward off-platform assets.

The operation's assets to date and at the time of the enforcement actions by the platforms included:

- 71 Twitter accounts collectively producing 42,475 tweets
- 49 Facebook accounts
- 69 Facebook pages
- 85 Instagram accounts

Some of the accounts appeared to belong to authentic individuals, who were contracted to post on behalf of the apparent NGO at the center of the operation. Others were purpose created and posed as different NGOs or activist accounts focused primarily on race issues and LGBTQ rights; these were created in or after June 2019, with a burst of account creation in July 2019. The "NGO" itself, "Eliminating Barriers to the Liberation of Africa" or EBLA, claimed to have been founded in June 2019, giving the operation an observable start date of June/July 2019.

A range of indicators showed that the assets were run from Ghana, including phone numbers, location tags on posts, and Facebook page transparency details. Since at least some of the operators appear to have unwittingly participated in this activity, this report does not identify any real individuals associated with the operation.

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[6] A notable exception was the IRA's "Black Matters US" outlet: operators primarily used Twitter and Google Ads to drive traffic toward the website after the initial Facebook page was suspended.
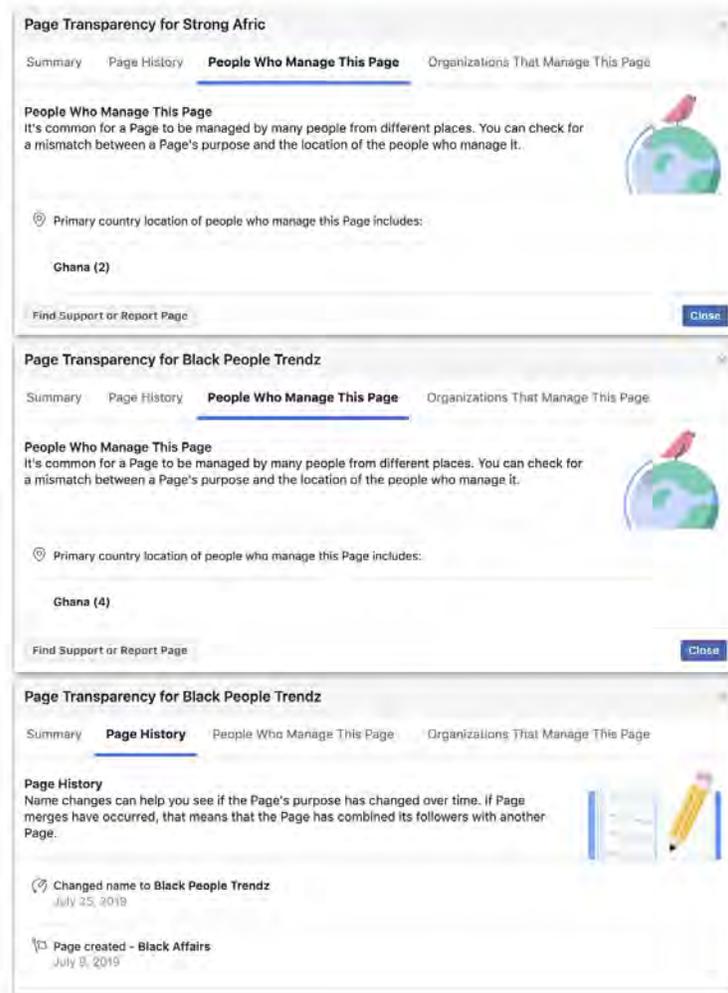
*Page Transparency for "Strong Afric" and "Black People Trendz," formerly "Black Affairs," showing the manager locations. Both pages were created on July 9, 2019, claimed to be NGOs, and largely posted about American issues. Name changes were a feature of this operation, as we shall see.*



*Geotag of a post from @blacks_truth, an account that chiefly posted about the United States. This set contained multiple instances of posts geo-tagged in Accra, or in the suburbs of Accra.*

This created an observable difference between the accounts' given location and the locations about which they focused. The operation's assets posted about American news and issues, especially black empowerment and police violence, far more than about Ghanaian or African issues. They also attempted to engage directly with American audiences.

*Instagram post from @infinityfemme (previously @blacks_news) designed to engage US audiences.*



*Sample posts by Strong Afric, focused on local incidents in the United States, including a Fox6Now [alert](#) for a missing man in Wisconsin.*

*Sample posts by Black People Trendz on racism and police brutality in the United States. The right-hand post is from an NBC News [report](#).*

Despite the ostensible NGO's mission statement valuing tolerance and inclusion, some of its posts adopted a more volatile tone, such as approving of, or advocating for, physical violence. One post even called for a Kentucky state senator to be "taken out" for sponsoring a bill that would [reportedly](#) give the police broader powers to stop and question people, based on suspicion of criminal activity. Others called for violence against minors.



*Left to right, posts by operation assets "Roots Revival," @one_world_dawili, and  Strong Afric justifying or calling for violence and punishment and for the Kentucky state senator to be "taken out."*

The operators left open a number of routes for direct engagement with genuine users. Many of their posts explicitly asked for follows; some accounts provided phone numbers (with country codes in Ghana and Nigeria) and emails (which often looked like personal Gmail addresses).

Neither Facebook nor Twitter provided any insights into whether the operators engaged users through direct messages, but the Facebook accounts were visibly active through this channel: Blacks_eye, for example, apparently replied to messages online within a day.



*Messenger page for Blacks_eye, showing the green button indicating it was online when the screenshot was taken in early March, and the typical reply time.*

The Double Deceit operation was only nine months old when it was suspended. Most of its posts still appeared aimed at building and consolidating an audience for their pages. That attempt had mixed results. Facebook said that the operation's 49 public pages amassed around 13,500 followers; the Instagram accounts amassed 235,000 followers, roughly two-thirds of whom were in the United States. The 71 Twitter accounts gained a little over 68,000 followers. This was not a massive, viral operation, but it sought to create a solid base for further growth.

Graphika also examined the archived activity of a set of suspended Twitter accounts that were related to the same operation. Some of these accounts had usernames unique to Twitter, but others, such as @ebla_network and @beautyofblacks, appeared to be the Twitter equivalents of assets on other platforms.

There were a total of 71 accounts, with 61 posting at least once (some appear to have been dormant). Although the earliest traces of activity go as far back as April 2014, systematic activity began in June 2019, a timeline consistent with the indicators on other platforms.
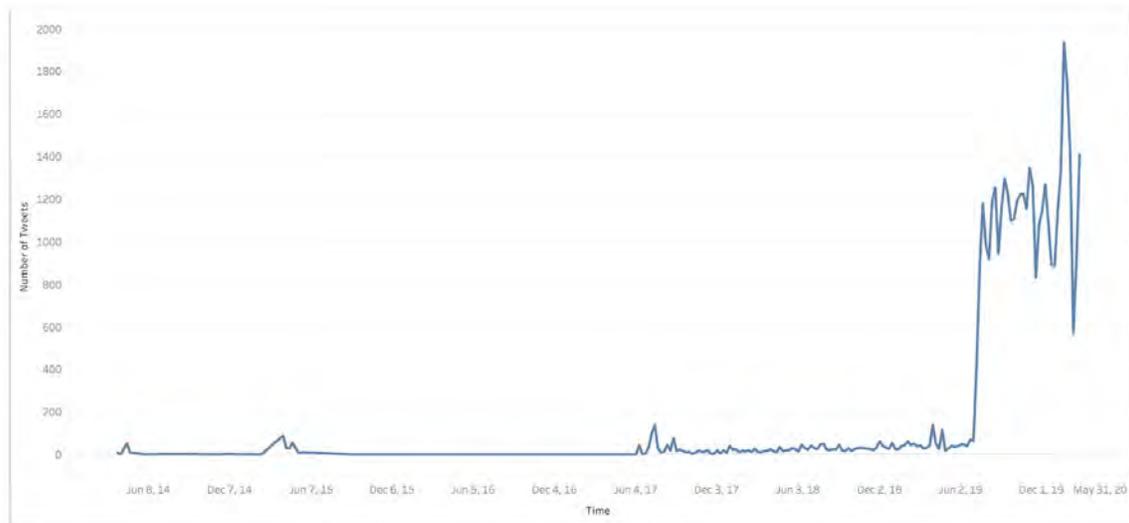
*Timeline of tweets by the operation's 71 assets. Posts before June 2019 appear to reflect activity by the individuals who later came to work for the operation.*

Activity levels on Twitter were fairly consistent as the operation ramped up, but none of the accounts was hyperactive. For instance, just 13 accounts posted more than 1,000 times over the period; the most active account in the set (@blackpride____) authored only 8,100 posts. Further, just over 40% of the total posts were retweets, suggesting some effort was made either to author original content or to copy-paste it from elsewhere. Other accounts in the operation also frequently amplified these original posts.

On Twitter, the accounts engaged primarily with a handful of hashtags that mirror the activity this operation had on other platforms. #BlackLivesMatter was the most used by a considerable margin; #racism and #policebrutality posts were interspersed with others on #blackexcellence and #blackhistorymonth.

| Hashtag | Number of Tweets | Number of Accounts |
|---|---|---|
| BlackLivesMatter | 1,396 | 42 |
| BlackLove | 604 | 39 |
| Africa | 270 | 35 |
| BlackExcellence | 343 | 33 |
| blackexcellence | 446 | 33 |
| PoliceBrutality | 833 | 32 |
| love | 370 | 32 |
| BlackHistoryMonth | 489 | 32 |
| racism | 1,239 | 31 |
| MondayMotivation | 222 | 30 |
| black | 218 | 29 |
| blacklivesmatter | 693 | 29 |

*The most common hashtags used on Twitter.*

## Ghanaian Content

A handful of the operation's content was in line with its Ghanaian location: a few posts talked about Ghana's politics, social life, and history, its tourist attractions, and its relationship with other African states. These constituted only a small fraction of the overall traffic; for example, the Instagram account @ssei_world_ posted about Ghana once, over a lifespan of 557 posts. The sharing was too sporadic to act as effective camouflage; it is more likely to reflect the operators' own interests and their perception that they were working for a genuine human rights NGO.



*Posts by @ssei_world_ (left) and @b_trends (right) on Ghana's neighborhood and its tourist attractions.*



*Posts by operation Instagram account @women.empowerment.ghana and Facebook account "Queer World" on Ghana.*

*Post by operation Instagram account @roots__are__deep, formerly @black_is_able, about Ghana.
The name change appears to have been an attempt at disguise after CNN and the social platforms
started investigating.*



*Content shared by Strong Afric from local Ghana website ghanaweb.com describing a female
student's escape from "racially motivated rape" in China. The link directs to the mobile version of
the article, suggesting the operator posted it from a mobile device.*

## Able was I, ere I saw EBLA

The ostensible NGO at the core of this network is called EBLA, Eliminating Barriers to the Liberation of Africa. According to the group's website, EBLA "employs the cyber activism approach - a mechanism where advocacy is done through the usage of the New Media (NM), to create awareness of human right issues in Africa and beyond via the sharing of stories or news on daily human right abuses. EBLA owns more than twenty accounts on each Social Media platform (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram)." The group claimed to have been set up in June 2019. Its first Instagram post came on September 2, 2019; its website, Twitter account, and Facebook page were set up in October.

Facebook identified EBLA as the key organization behind this campaign; CNN, investigating on the ground, reported from the organization's headquarters in Ghana and interviewed one of its employees, who confirmed that they were given instructions on what to post on social media and advised to post in the late afternoon and at night. Ghana is on Greenwich Mean Time, five hours ahead of the US East Coast; afternoon and evening posting would thus fall in the daytime across the United States.

When information operations are accused of impersonating human rights NGOs, it is especially important to evaluate these claims with the highest standards of rigor and to give the organization every possible benefit of the doubt, to avoid the silencing of genuine (and often already threatened) voices.

According to the EBLA website and Facebook and Instagram accounts, the group had real employees and conducted one on-the-ground charitable action, distributing stationery with the EBLA logo to schoolchildren in Ghana. It was not, therefore, entirely a work of digital deception.[7]

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[7] To evaluate the different "types" of proxy organizations involved in information operations, Graphika uses two core dimensions: the organization's awareness that it is participating in a deceptive campaign and the amount of activity unrelated to the deceptive campaign that the organizations also participates in.

*Detail of a post on the EBLA Facebook page, showing the branded merchandise.*

However, the website also revealed traces consistent with deceptive activity. EBLA claimed to be "funded by members and individuals like you," and the website featured prominent buttons inviting users to donate. However, the wide-ranging list of projects it boasted - including building schools and providing food and water - was largely populated with stock Latin texts, and all its "donate" buttons were in test mode, meaning that it was impossible to offer an actual donation. One of the projects claimed to have raised $231.52 billion - over three times [Ghana's annual GDP](#).
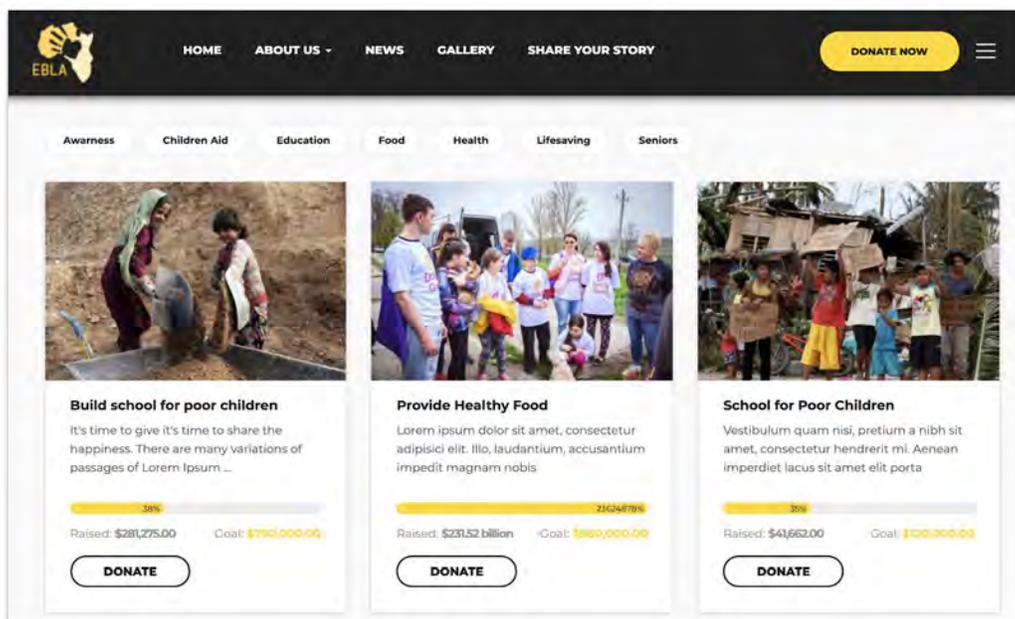


*The EBLA "donations" page. Note the stock Latin text "Lorem ipsum," the crossover between the first and third projects ("Build school for poor children" and "School for Poor Children"), and the 200 billion dollar raise.*

Several of the "project" headlines appeared to replicate one another ("Build school for poor children" and "school for poor children"; "Water for all children" and "Clean water for kids"). The identical project headlines, with the identical Latin tags underneath, appeared on a number of other apparent charity websites; two even featured the identical images, language, and implausible sums raised.
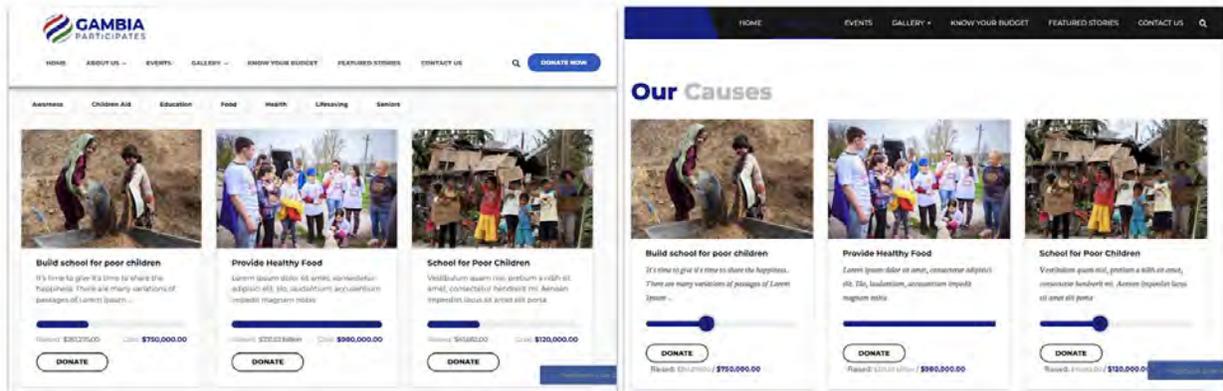


*Donations pages for [gambiaparticipate.org](gambiaparticipate.org) (left) and [collectiftubakunde.org](collectiftubakunde.org) (right). Note the image and text matches and the total sums listed.*

The website also listed news articles that were inconsistent with EBLA's description of its creation in June 2019. The "Latest News" section featured four articles: one description of the school visit mentioned above, and three stories from the first half of 2017. A Google search for the relevant texts showed that they appeared verbatim on a number of other apparent charity websites, including those which also featured matching imagery.



*"Latest News" section from the footer of the EBLA website, showing the articles dated to April and May 2017.*

EBLA's social media content was coordinated, working across multiple platforms to share the same content to multiple audiences, for example, sharing screenshots of tweets and advertising its Instagram account on its Facebook page.
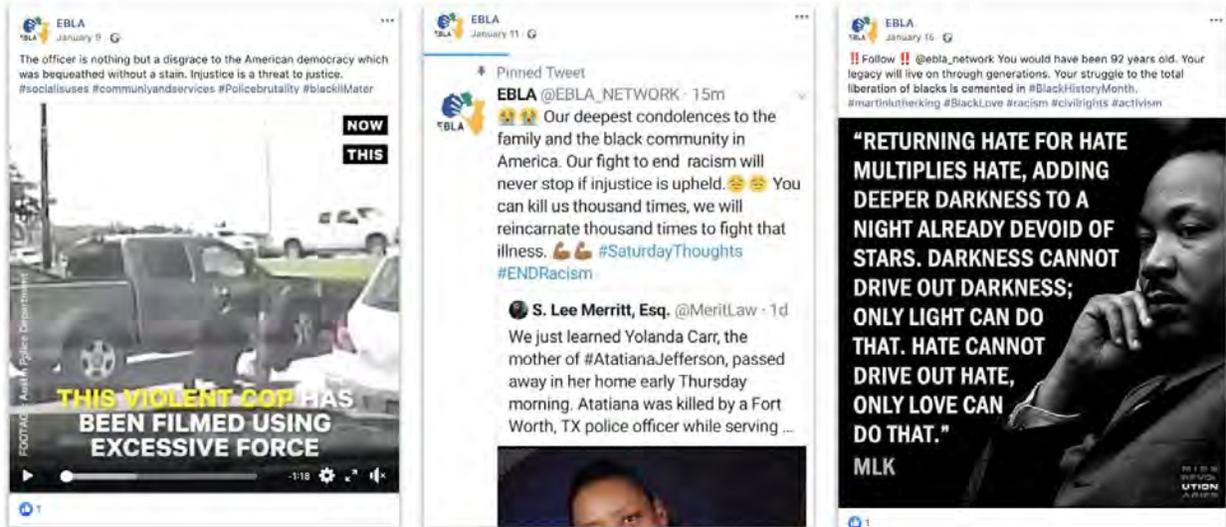


*Three posts from the EBLA Facebook page, all focused on race issues and tensions in the United States. The left-hand post is a video share, the center post shares an EBLA tweet, and the right-hand post appears copied from the EBLA Instagram account, since it urges users to "follow @ebla_network." This was the handle of the Instagram account; the Facebook handle was @EBLA.GHANA.AFRICA.*

The content was split between a number of topics. Of 44 posts between October 1, 2019, when the Facebook account was created, and February 5, 2020, the date of its last post, eight dealt with events in Africa. Twelve dealt with racism, racial injustice, or race-based violence in the United States. Four dealt with women's rights, and eight were broader calls for tolerance.

*Tolerance-themed posts from the EBLA Facebook page.*

This is broadly in line with EBLA's self-declared mission to "create awareness of human right (sic) issues in Africa and beyond" but with a definite emphasis on "beyond," specifically the United States, rather than Africa. However, it is also consistent with the early stages of a covert information operation trying to build an audience among Black American communities through a mixture of positive and negative posting.

Two other posts are of particular interest. Published in October, these advertised for EBLA staff "with experience in Social Media management" in Nigeria; one of the two received over 3,000 likes. In January 2020, EBLA advertised on LinkedIn for a "Chapter Coordinator" in Charleston, South Carolina. The LinkedIn ad urged potential American applicants to "join hands with our brothers and sisters world-wide, especially in the United States where POC are mostly subjected to all forms of Brutality." There is no indication that either ad directly led to a hire, but it shows a clear interest in establishing a presence on the ground in the United States. The choice of Charleston is noteworthy, as it was the site of a protest that the IRA-attributed Black Matters US group assisted in organizing via their @rallycharleston account, as well as running ads immediately following the white nationalism inspired 2015 mass shooting at Emanuel AME church.
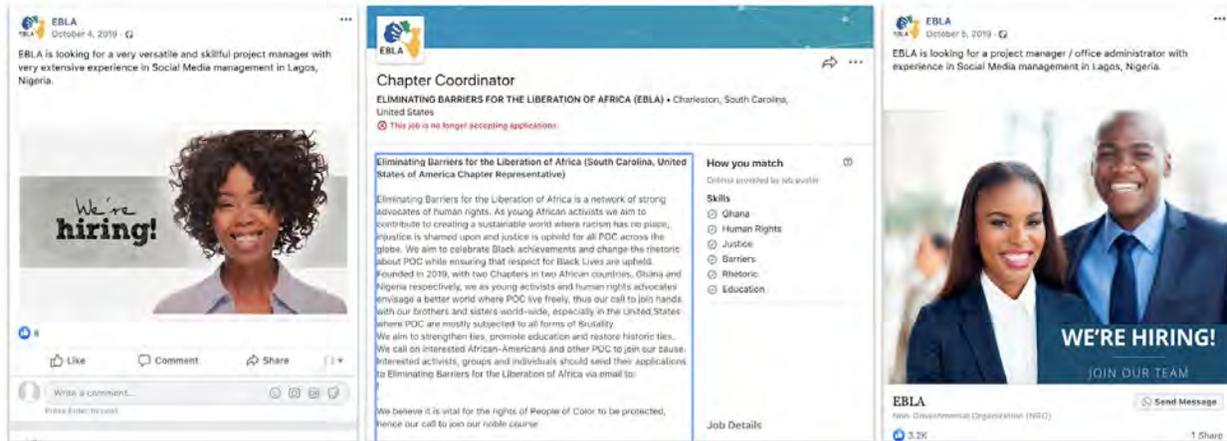
*EBLA job ads for Nigeria and the United States.*

It is unclear how much EBLA's staff knew about the purpose of the operation and the individuals associated with it. According to CNN, EBLA's manager presented himself to them under a false name and told the organization's staff that their job was online activism; an EBLA staff member interviewed by CNN said they had "no idea" they would be working as a Russian troll. Facebook said the operation involved "witting and unwitting" users. The vast majority of the operation's posts did not deal directly with the US election but focused on civil and human rights, with a particular focus on the black community in America. It is therefore likely that at least some of the keyboard operators were deceived as to the purpose of their activity, even while that purpose was to deceive American users as to the origins of the content.

For this reason, Graphika has nicknamed this IRA-associated operation Double Deceit.

# The Content

Operation Double Deceit posted on a range of issues, but with a special focus on the Black American communities. It appeared to be in the early stages of audience building: it blended positive posts about African women's beauty and hair, African and Black American high achievers, the African heritage, history, and civil rights, sexual minorities, and broad human rights issues, with negative posts about racism and police violence in the United States.

There was no systematic mention of the US presidential election, nor was there a systematic focus on any candidate. When candidates were mentioned, the mentions concerned issues of human rights, tolerance, and racism, in line with the apparent focus of the Double Deceit assets.

A selection of content samples from across the operation focusing on beauty, black excellence, racism, and police violence is included at the end of this report. The following sections focus on the resemblance between Double Deceit and earlier IRA campaigns; the small amount of content

that dealt with the US elections; the operation's coordinated use of the same memes and visual style across multiple accounts; its attempts to hide; and its overall impact.

## Copying IRACopyPasta?

Unlike the original Internet Research Agency operation that targeted the United States from 2014 to 2017, Double Deceit was run from Africa and used locals on the ground to make its posts. However, on occasion, it used memes based on the same images as the original IRA, creating a strong visual similarity between the operations.

Those memes were not unique to the IRA and may indicate no more than that the Ghanaian operators picked up the same popular and successful memes from elsewhere as the original IRA did, a case of parallel evolution rather than direct descent. However, given the attribution of this operation to individuals associated with past activity by the IRA, we include the resemblance here as an illustration of the continuity of theme between the two operations.

The memes included both positive, audience-building posts and negative content focused on racial tensions.
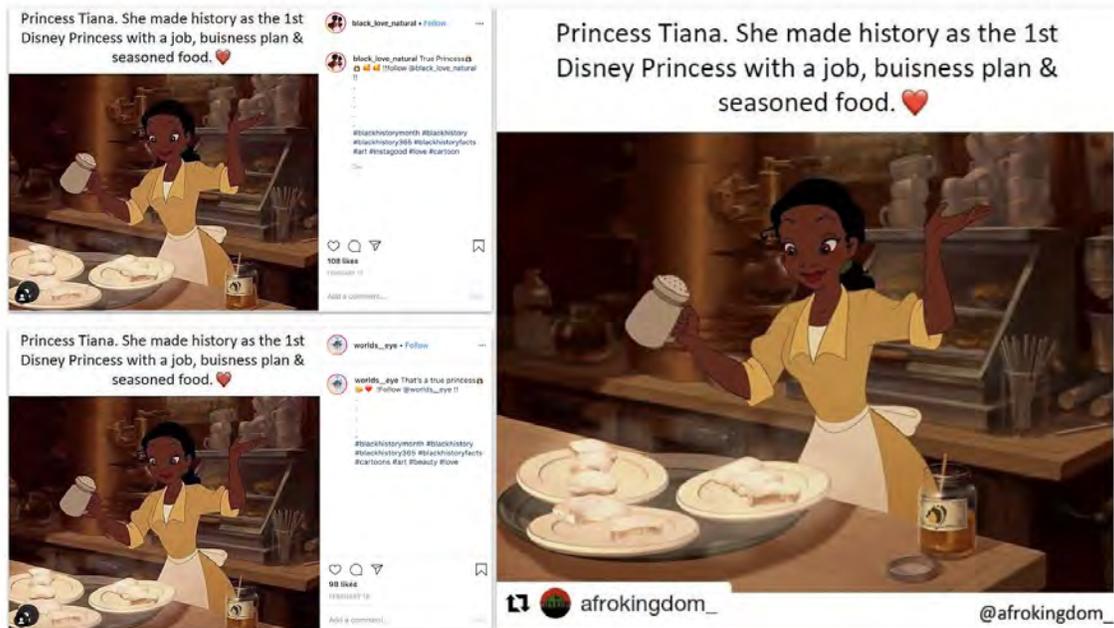


*Left, memes posted by operation accounts @black_love_natural and @worlds_eye. Right, meme posted by original IRA account @afrokingdom_, preserved in the USHadrons archive.*
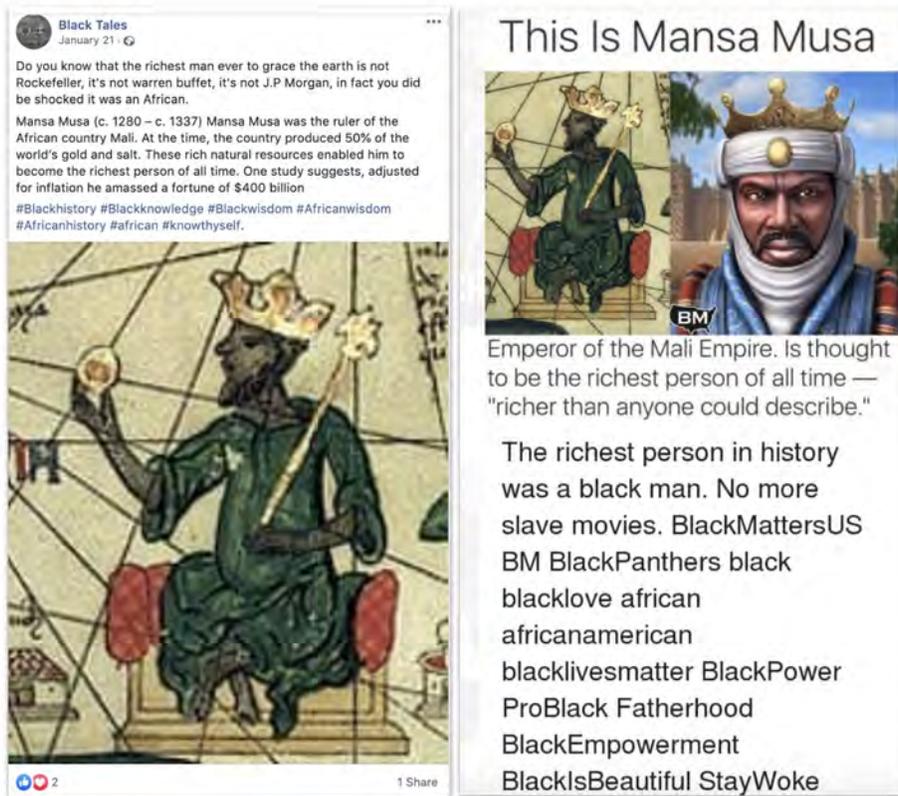
*Left, Facebook post by operation account "Black Tales." Right, post by original IRA account "Black Matters US," identified by the watermark, from the USHadrons [archive](archive).*



*Left, Instagram post by @revelation_of_excellence. Right, post by original IRA account Black Matters US, identified by the watermark, from the USHadrons [archive](archive).*

*Left, meme by "No need for racism," based on an image associating the police with violence, racism, and the Ku Klux Klan. Right, the same underlying image posted by original IRA account "Nefertiti Community," preserved in the USHadrons [archive](#).*

Another way the Ghana-based operation resembled earlier IRA activity was in its extensive use of language copied and pasted from genuine users. This was a particular feature of the IRA operation exposed in 2019 that Graphika has dubbed [IRACopyPasta](#). In the case of CopyPasta, the copying appears to have been intended to embed the IRA campaign more firmly in its target audience by using language characteristic of that audience, and to have camouflaged the operation's foreign origins by hiding behind genuine native speech. In the case of Double Deceit, it appears designed to inflate the amount of content available for the least effort.

For example, the Facebook post on Malian king Mansa Musa illustrated above included a passage that was word-for-word identical with a bio published on the website [Biography Online](#) in January 2018. The same post also included an apparently original passage that was marked by non-standard English grammar: "you did be shocked it was an African."
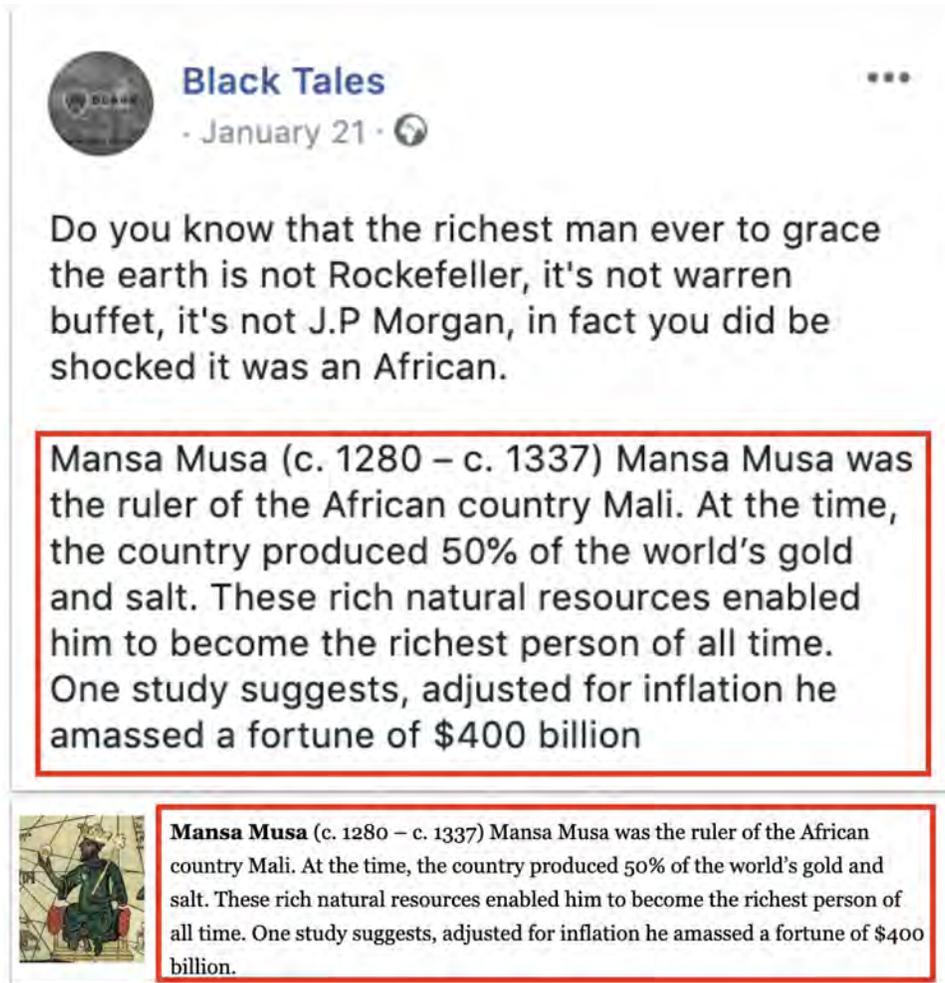
*Comparison of the Black Tales post and the Biography Online entry.*

A post about a Ghanaian PhD student presenting to the UK House of Commons was copied from the online Ghanaian American Journal. The Instagram account @kofibrukua, which focused on LGBTQ issues, repeatedly shared verbatim texts and screenshots from outlets including LGBTQ Nation and pinknews.co.uk, without attributing them or providing links to the full text. This account was originally called @rainbow_vvoice but changed its name in late February 2020 after Twitter suspended the operation's accounts on its platform.

*Top, article by LGBTQ Nation. Bottom, verbatim copy of the article, without naming the source outlet or providing a link, posted by @kofibrukua.*

The Facebook page Blacks_eye repeatedly posted content from U.S.-based outlet the Atlanta Black Star, self-described as a "narrative company" whose aim is to publish "empowering narratives for all people of African descent and everyone who adheres to our culture". Blacks_eye itself was one of the cluster of pages created on July 9, 2019 and overtly managed from Ghana.
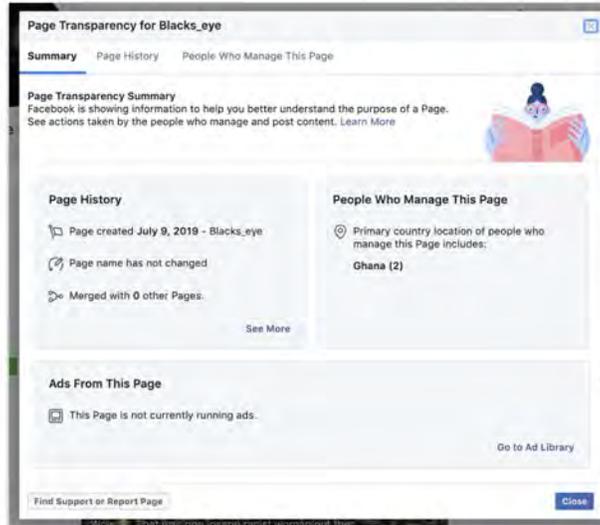
*Page transparency feature for Blacks_eye showing the manager location and creation date.*

Each time the Facebook page posted Atlanta Black Star content, it used the t.co link shortener, which is Twitter's shortening service. On each occasion, the t.co link on the Blacks_eye page matched the t.co link on the Atlanta Black Star Twitter account, indicating that Operation Double Deceit took its content direct from the Twitter feed, rather than, for example, the website.
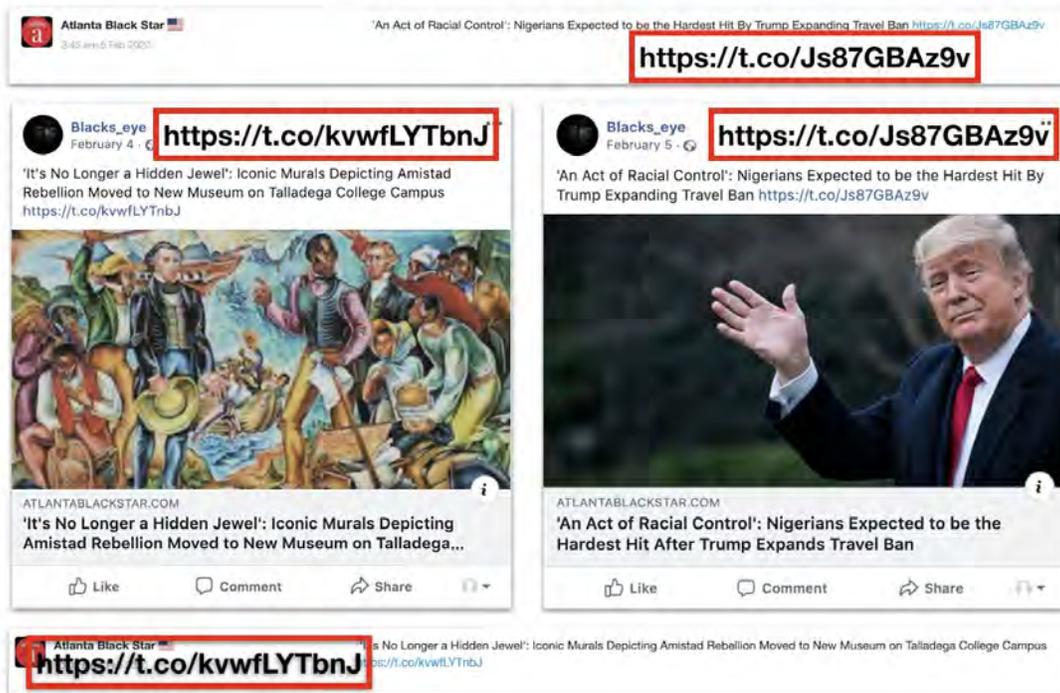


*Top and bottom, tweets from the Atlanta Black Star, showing the t.co short links. Center left and right, shares of the same stories by Blacks_eye showing the same t.co links.*

These techniques are innocent in themselves: many genuine social media users copy content without attribution and post from one platform to another. In this case, however, the technique allowed the operators in Ghana to access a ready stock of genuine content appropriate to the themes they associated themselves with, allowing them to build character and audience.

## Little focus on electoral politics in the US

Very little of the operation's content referenced the 2020 US presidential election or its candidates directly, and those that did mention them did so in a way that was appropriate to their ostensible personas as human rights activists. For example, one of the operation's earlier posts, in August 2019, featured a clip from a Democratic debate in which Rep. Tulsi Gabbard called out Senator Kamala Harris for her record as a prosecutor.



*Post by @heart_of_afric featuring the video of Tulsi Gabbard and Kamala Harris.*

A post by LGBTQ-focused account @kofibrukua (formerly @rainbow_vvoice) focused on Democratic candidate Tom Steyer and his stance on LGBTQ issues.

**Tom Steyer stumbles when asked about his past comments on LGBTQ issues**

When asked about his previous comments during CNN's LGBTQ Town Hall, Steyer asked, "I did?" and "Could you remind me what I said?"

By Daniel Villarreal    Thursday, January 16, 2020

Tom Steyer
Photo: Shutterstock

kofibrukua • Follow

kofibrukua Tom Steyer stumbled when asked about his past comments on Lgbtq issues. Your past will always hunt you if you don't do the right thing.
Follow @rainbow_vvoice for more content.
.
.
.
.
.
.
#gaylife #ftm #cute #gayhot #rainbow

7w

49 likes
JANUARY 17

Add a comment...                    Post

*Post by @kofibrukua on Tom Steyer.*

A number of posts criticized or mocked US President Donald Trump, notably pointing to his stance on race relations and LGBTQ rights. At least one post defended him, and other posts mentioned presidential candidates Senator Elizabeth Warren and Mayor Pete Buttigieg. Again, however, these were not pitched in the context of the election but of broader issues of race and gay rights.



**Pete Buttigieg walks back his 'grumpy' comment about not reading LGBTQ media**

He had said, "I can't even read the LGBT media anymore, because it's all, 'He's too gay, not gay enough, wrong kind of gay.'"

By Daniel Villarreal    Sunday, September 22, 2019    42 Comments

queerafrica1 • Follow

queerafrica1 Pete Buttigieg has walked back his comment made earlier this week that he doesn't read LGBTQ media  because of its constant criticisms of his sexuality. He called his comment "a grumpy moment" before acknowledging both the importance of queer media at this time and that criticisms of his sexuality come from sources other than LGBTQ media.
#humanityfirst #transformationtuesday #lgbtq #queer #nodiscriminacion

24w

22 likes
SEPTEMBER 24, 2019

Add a comment...

*Post on Buttigieg by operation asset @queerafrica1.*

*Post on Warren by operation asset @roots__are_deep, formerly @black_is_able.*



*Posts defending and attacking Trump by operation asset @one_world_dawili; the right-hand post features Senator Bernie Sanders calling Trump a "racist," a "xenophobe," and a "religious bigot."*

The references to the election and to individual candidates formed a small minority of overall content and did not reveal a pattern of systematically attacking or defending one particular candidate. Operation Double Deceit appeared focused on building its audience in the target community; it did not appear to focus on the 2020 election in any systematic way.

## Coordinated posting and shared content

Across platforms, the operation's assets functioned as a network, posting the same content, using the same visual style, and following and amplifying each other. Of the 71 accounts in the asset list provided by Twitter, 47 were mentioned or retweeted by at least one other account in the network.

In-network amplification (which accounted for just over 9,800 tweets in the total dataset) appears to have been coordinated to skew in favor of a small number of select accounts . The top three accounts received over half of all in-network retweets or mentions (~60%) and the top ten accounts received 84%, indicating the network favored heavily amplifying or boosting a few accounts to expand their reach. This behavior appears to have been done with little use of automation tools; 93% of total posts were made via Twitter for Android, in line with CNN's reporting that the employees were issued phones to use for the project.

Structural analysis of in-network interaction indicates that the engagement followed discernible patterns, based largely on common themes and focused around a few central accounts.

In the network graph on the following page, nodes represent in-network accounts and edges represent mentions or retweets between them. The large, purple cluster accounts for over 56% of the graph and represents accounts largely focused on police brutality and other content that can largely be classified as falling under the remit of the Black Lives Matter movement. Accounts within this cluster were primarily centered around @blackpride___, @AfricaMustWake, @ElevateBlacks, and @BlackBarriers.

Accounts within the orange cluster mostly tweeted about LGBTQ+ issues; these accounts tended to amplify @EBLA_NETWORK but also engaged in moderate levels of intra-cluster amplification, as evidenced by the star-like pattern in the graph visualization below. Similarly, accounts within the green cluster engaged in low levels of back and forth boosting; however, they too were largely centered around a single account: @Blac_Impact. In terms of content, this cluster alternated between black-centric aspirational content, social injustice, and social media marketing.
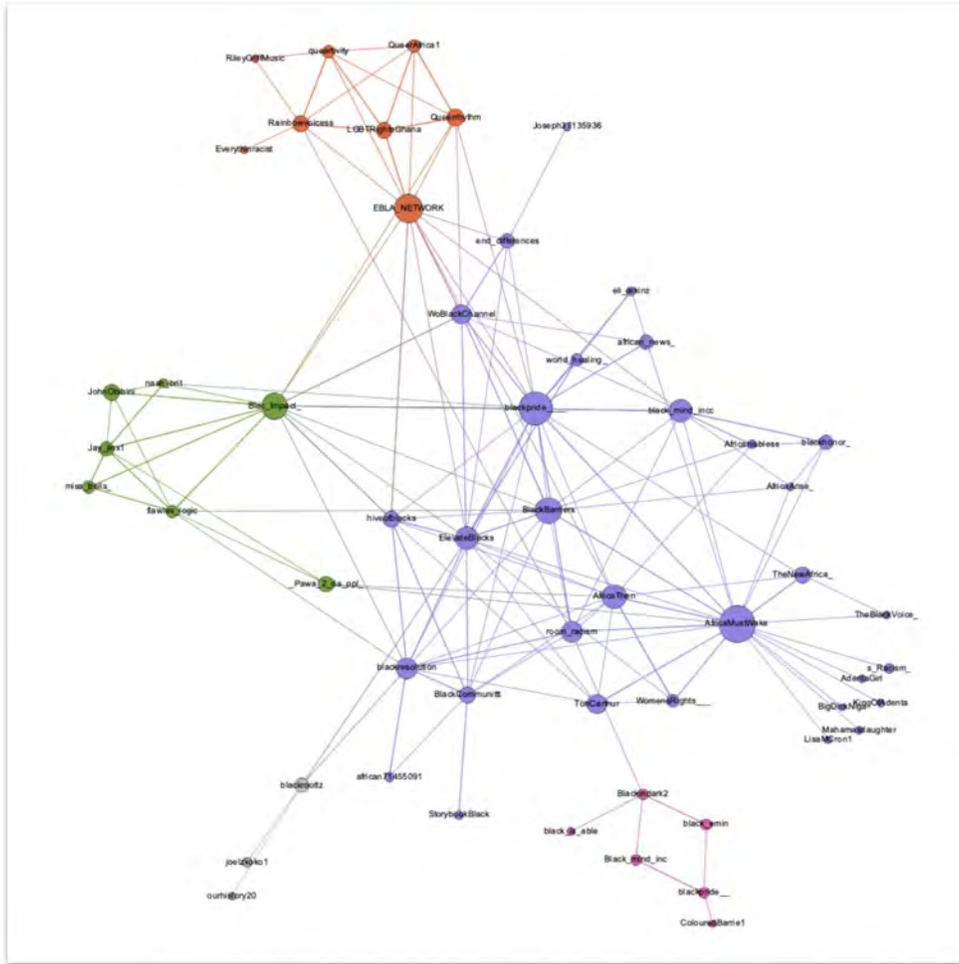
*Simple mentions graph of assets provided by Twitter; colors represent cluster affiliation.*

Across social platforms, the operators repeatedly shared the same meme to different accounts or the same meme on the same account at different times.
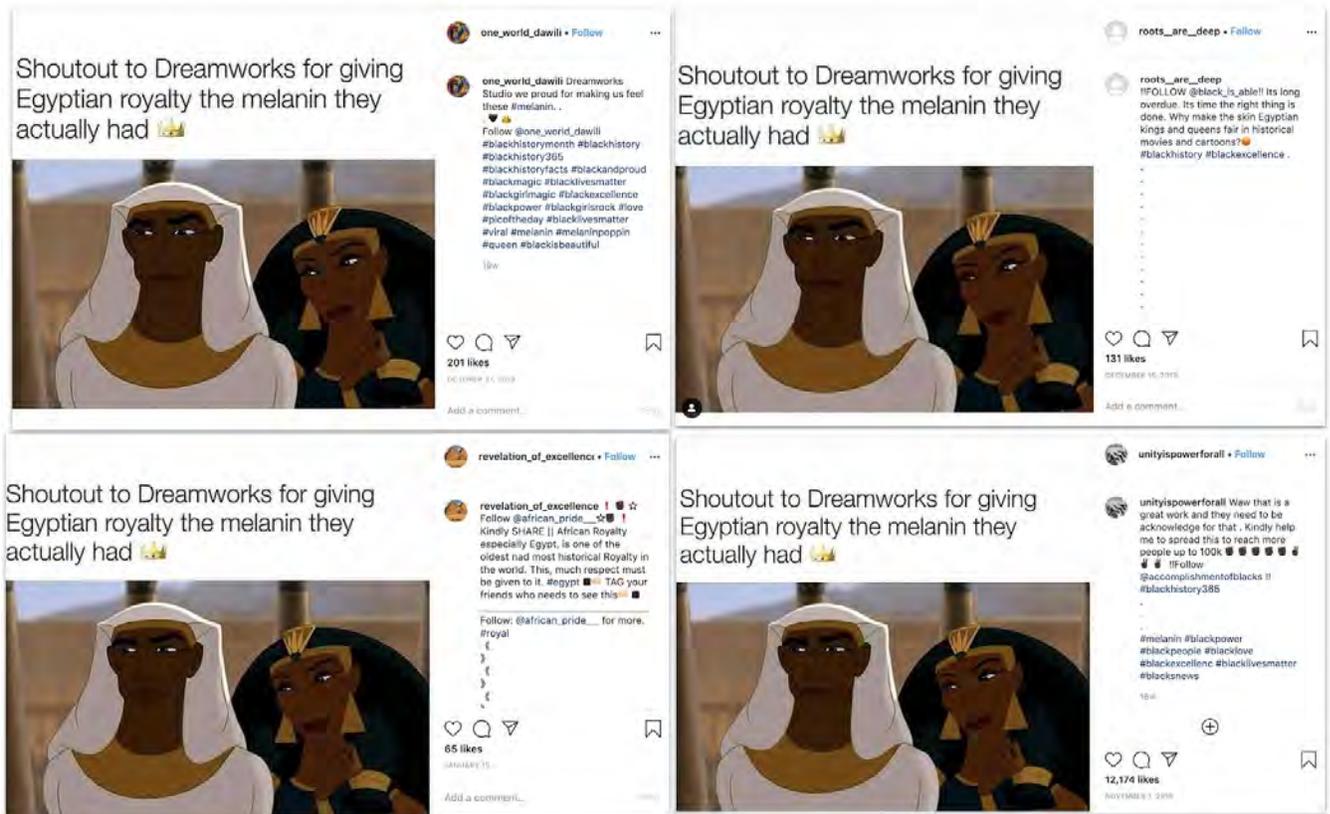


*The same meme posted by operation account @worlds_eye on November 20, 2019 (left) and March 10, 2020 (right).*

*The same meme posted by operation account @worlds_eye on November 20 and December 15, 2019. Note that both reference Black History Month, which is in February.*
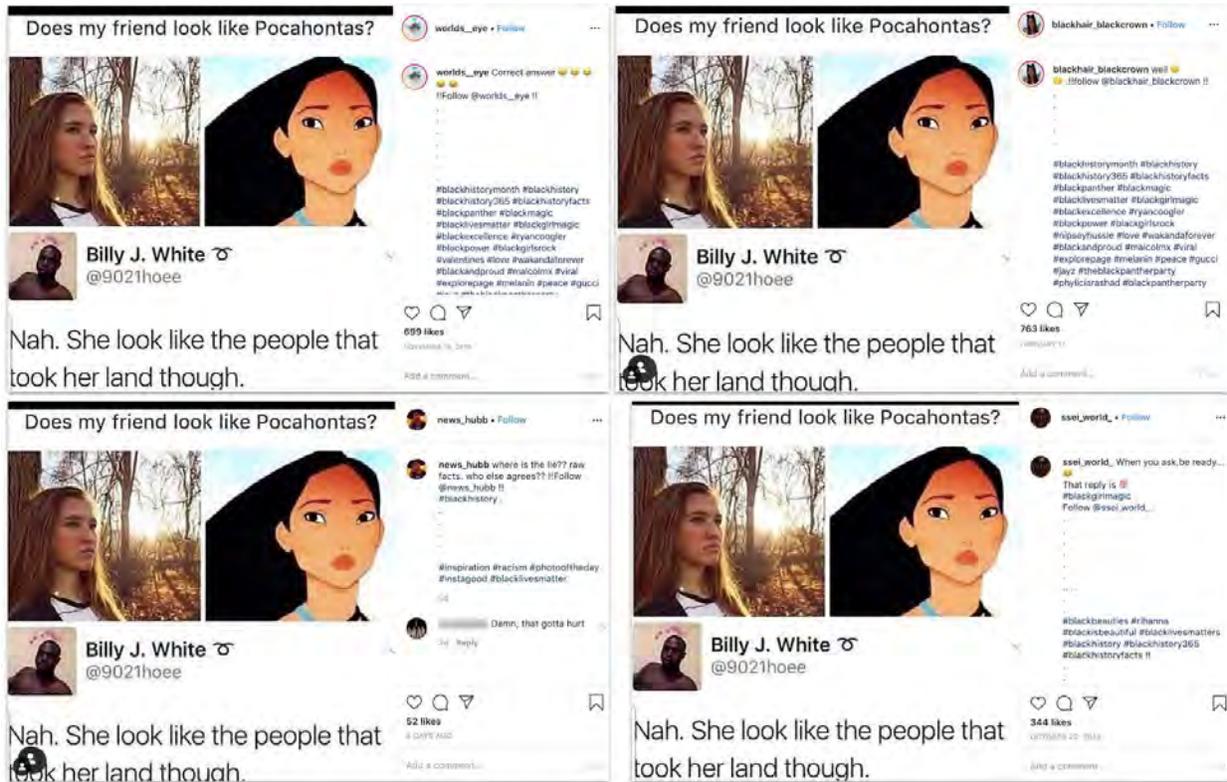


*The same meme posted by operation accounts @worlds_eye, @blackhair_blackcrown, @news_hubb and @ssei_world_ between October 2019 and March 2020.*

*The same meme posted by accounts @one_world_dawili, @roots_are_deep (formerly @black_is_able), @revelation_of_excellence (formerly  @african_pride__), and @unityispowerforall (formerly @acomplishmentofblacks).*

The network also had a uniform visual style, especially on Instagram. Here, a number of accounts used their Instagram highlights, which appear in circles at the top of the profile, to spell out words indicative of the accounts' thematic focus. This suggested a house style and a degree of creative coordination between the operators.

*Profiles for operation accounts @blackbeautyguru, @trendsworldwide__ , and @kofibrukua (formerly @rainbow_vvoice).*

All these factors indicate a coordinated operation working off a single playbook, a shared stock of content and a shared visual style.

## Hide-and-seek

In late February, Twitter suspended the operation's assets on its platform, following tip-offs from CNN and researchers at Clemson University. In the wake of the suspension, the operation's Instagram accounts changed their names *en masse* in what can only have been a coordinated attempt to hide.

However, their earlier practice of urging users to follow them in many of their posts meant that they left behind clear traces, allowing researchers to reconstitute their activity. Many of those

moments are noted above; in the illustration below, the account @blacksbhae was originally called @Perfect_Africano, as shown by its posts and bio.
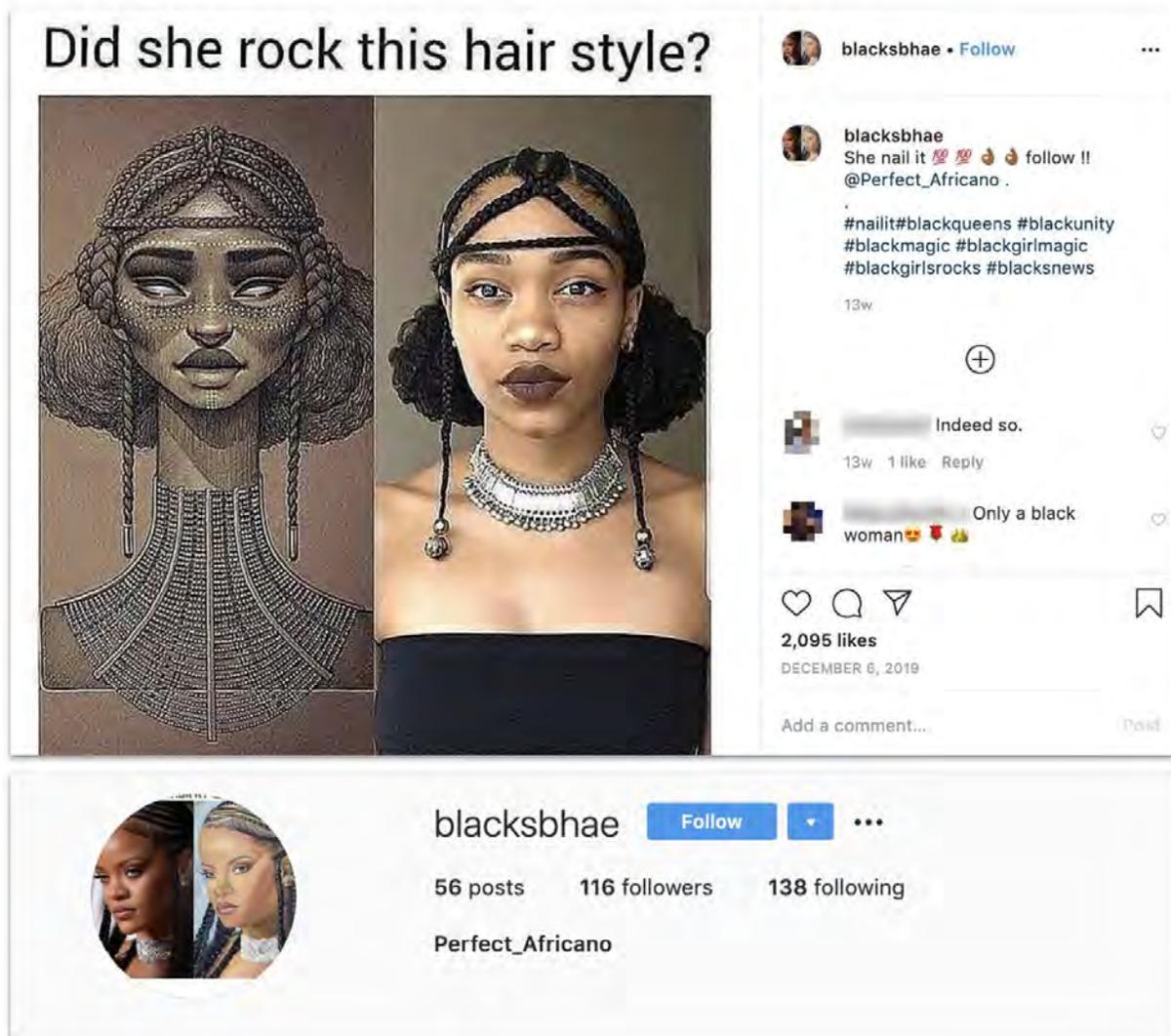


*Post and bio of @blacksbhae, showing the shoutouts to its earlier name.*

The late account most recently called @_mrsmagic led an even more adventurous existence. This account started out as @racists_busted. At the end of February, it changed to @_mrs_magic, before changing again on March 11 to @_mrsmagic. Facebook took it down on March 12. A similar fate led @blackness_unleashed to change to @_beautiful_angels and then @_beautifulangels.
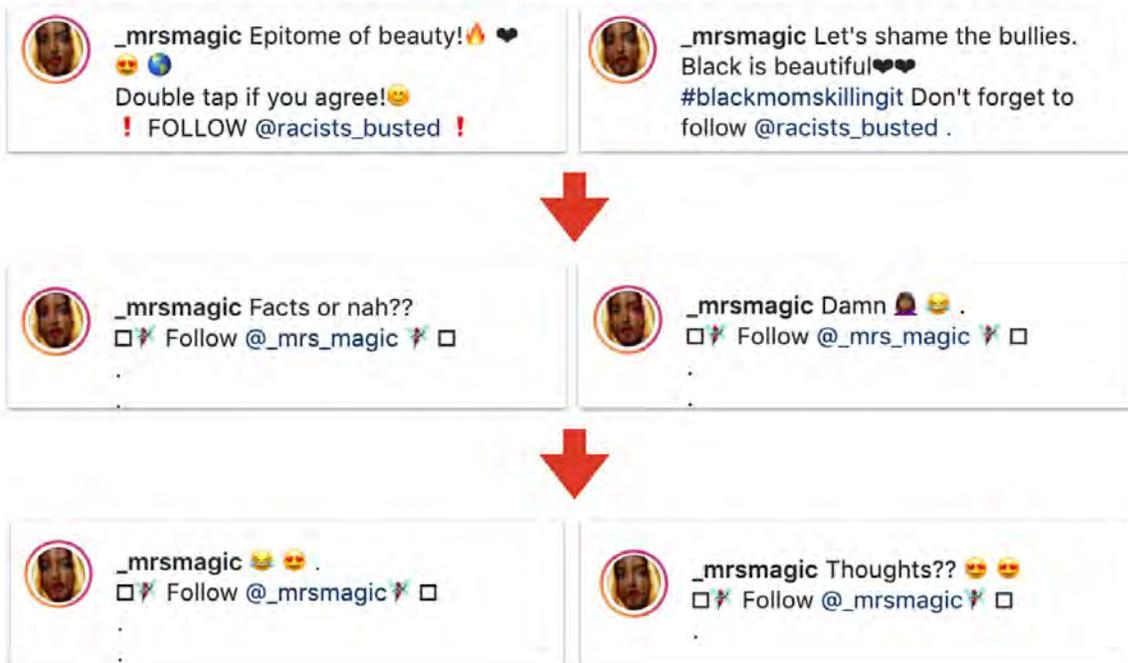
*From busting racists to Mrs Magic: the name changes of one account.*
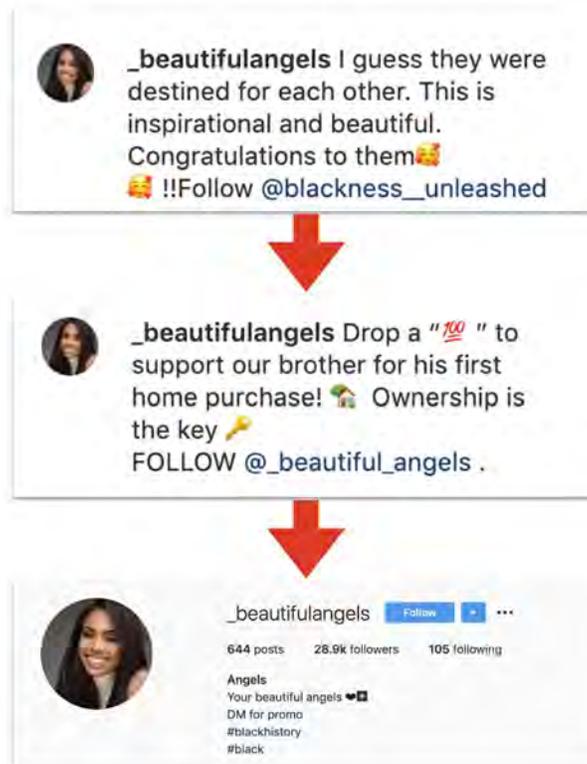


*From @blackness__unleashed to @_beautifulangels.*

These were not particularly sophisticated attempts at concealment, since they left a visible record in the posting history, nor do they represent the "new" accounts that, according to CNN, the operation's manager advised his operators to create.

## Virality and audience

Operation Double Deceit seemed to have had mixed success at consolidating an online following for its accounts and entities across platforms. As noted earlier, the Facebook pages gathered a combined following of only some 13,500 accounts, and their posts did not generally achieve viral attention.

On Twitter, the operation as a whole gained modest attention, with a little over 68,000 followers. For context, this is half the following amassed by one IRA account from the original 2016 campaign, @TEN_GOP.

The Twitter accounts appeared to loosely divide their functions between content creators and content amplifiers. The majority of accounts never gained more than 10 retweets for any single posts, but other users in the set achieved some mild traction. The most successful post, authored by @TheNewAfrica_, gained 6,437 retweets and 10,314 likes and read "Hector Pino invented FreshWater, a machine that can pull moisture out of the air, filter it and turn it into pure drinking water with the press of a button. Lets (sic) celebrate our own, RT of (sic) you are proud to be black." This underscores how positive, affirmative content tended to generate the operation's largest impact.

The Twitter operation certainly tried to reach genuine influencers. Accounts within the network tended to target or amplify external accounts in much the same way they engaged in-network assets, with a select few accounts receiving most of the engagement.

Operation Double Deceit tended to amplify or reach out to mainstream media outlets - like CNN, Now This News, ABC, and Al Jazeera - as well as activists, influencers, and politicians, like @TariqNasheed, @BarackObama, and @_SJPeace_. Not surprisingly, the operation also tried to engage with accounts focused on issues related to racial, social, and economic justice; for example, @TheRoot, @ATLBlackStar, Huffington Post's @blackvoices, @Blklivesmatter, and @PinkNews were among some of the most mentioned and retweeted accounts.

The Twitter accounts for this operation also regularly retweeted accounts ostensibly operated by black Americans and social justice-oriented individuals with low to moderate follower counts. In most cases, one or two of the operation's assets would retweet a genuine account with 100-1,000 followers a handful of times. The frequency with which this occurred - the operation behaved this way toward almost 5,000 accounts - may indicate that accounts strategically engaged with black

Americans on Twitter in an effort to cultivate credibility and develop an audience within the community.

As a whole, however, the Twitter arm of the campaign appears to have struggled to reach the much larger engagement figures of the Instagram accounts.

Instagram was the operation's most effective platform in terms of followers and in terms of the impact of individual posts. As Facebook (which owns Instagram) announced, the operation's Instagram branch amassed over 265,000 followers. Individual posts achieved genuine virality: the most popular one scored over 125,000 likes, and others scored in the tens of thousands.



*Post from @black_girl_blogg and the Twitter original.*



*Meme posted by @blacks_trendz; the text traced back to a Facebook post from a genuine user.*

*Meme posted by @unityispowerforall and original [tweet](#) from @Moorinformation.*



*Meme from @unityispowerforall and the Twitter [original](#).*

These viral posts had two things in common. First, they focused on positive themes of black beauty and empowerment. Second, they were copied from online posts that had already received substantial online engagement, in the thousands or tens of thousands of reactions. This is similar to the CopyPasta campaign described above. Again, it marks Double Deceit as an exercise in audience building, at least at this stage.

Impact can be achieved in different ways. On several occasions, users on Pinterest who seemed to have no link with Operation Double Deceit pinned its content. This was content the operation had itself taken from online sources, showing that the operation managed to influence genuine users at least enough to get them to share its posts elsewhere. However, these were not posts that the operation had created, merely posts that it had borrowed from elsewhere. This illustrates the complexity of such operations, where an influence operation can take content from one unwitting source and pass it on to another.
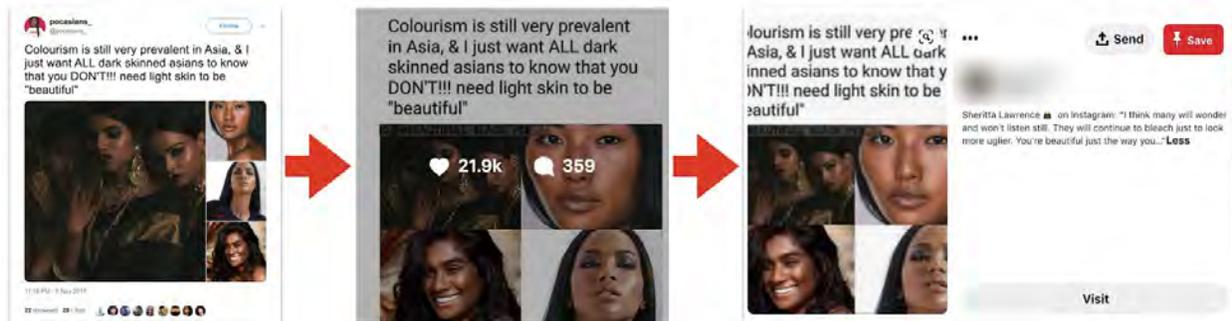


*Left, tweet by @pocasians on skin tone; the tweet scored 28 likes. Center, the tweet as a screenshot on the operation account @_black_women_matter_ (screen name "Sheritta Lawrence"), with almost 22,000 likes. Right, the Instagram post on Pinterest, shared by a user who shows no link to the operation.*

# Appendix: Content Samples

## Beauty

**Women**

**Children**

**Cancer Remission**

At 9 years old, I had a rare blood cancer. Now I've reclaimed control over my health and body through fitness. This is by far my proudest transformation! 🙂 #cancersucks

unityispowerforall • Follow

unityispowerforall Amazing❤️❤️❤️ !!Follow @unityispowerforall !! #blacknews

#melanin #blackpower #blackhistory #blackpeople #blacklove #blackexcellence #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #BlackGirlsRock

wesome
🐍 very happy for you 🔥 💯

1 like   Reply

708 likes

FEBRUARY 20

Add a comment...

## Black Don't Crack



Father & Son 20 Years Later

TALK 2 POPS

blackfashiontips • Follow

blackfashiontips black dont crack 🙌 🙌 .!!Follow @blackfashiontips !!

#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blackpanther #blackmagic #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #blackexcellence #ryancoogler #blackpower #blackgirlsrock #nipseyhussle #love #wakandaforever #blackandproud #malcolmx #viral #explorepage #melanin #peace #gucci #jayz #theblackpantherparty #phyliciarashad #blackpantherparty

449 likes

FEBRUARY 17

Add a comment...

42

**Phylicia Rashad Is Absolutely STUNNING At 70 Years Old!**
@PowerfulBlackStories

unityispowerforall • Follow
...

unityispowerforall Blacks don't crack they are always growing backward. She is looking beautiful 🖤🖤💅💅 !! Follow @accomplishmentofblacks !! #blacksnews
.
.
#melanin #blackpower #blackhistory #blackpeople #blacklove #blackexcellence #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #BlackGirlsRock

8w

AT: Realpy. So Correction. Over 💯 👁 🔱 Yeah¡!?

2,030 likes
JANUARY 13

Add a comment...

# "Black excellence"

## Military & First Responders



**Delta flight attendant becomes Georgia National Guard's first black female pilot**
@KISHLB

KEEP CLIMBING

blacks_truth • Follow
...

blacks_truth !!Follow @blacks_truth !! We love this kind of stories. A true Black Hero. There always light at the end of the tunnel .

747 likes
FEBRUARY 24

Add a comment...

de.african.daughter • Follow ···

de.african.daughter #LossieDavis is the first African-American woman to be appointed to the Southport Police Department. She moved to Indianapolis for 29 and formed Broken but Blessed Ministries, a healing ministry and book club for people suffering from grief and loss after her son was murdered. .

Follow.... @de.african.daughter
.
.
.
.

57 likes

JANUARY 24

Add a comment... Post

## Sports



Not the fastest woman. Not the fastest Black woman. THE FASTEST IN THE WORLD PERIOD!!!! Only 18yrs old!!!😳😳😳 From Dallas Texas!!

#🏃🏿💨💨💨💨



blackwomenconnect_ • Follow ···

blackwomenconnect_ Meet the fastest in the world🥇🥇 .!!Follow @blackwomenconnect_ !! #sports .
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#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blacklivesmatter #blackexcellence #kobe #love #beautiful #family #selfie #photooftheday #instagood #fashion #lashes #instafashion

3d

2,962 likes

3 DAYS AGO

Add a comment... Post

**Meet the 7-Year Old Smashing Records as the Fastest Boy in the Country**

glitzsafrica · Follow

glitzsafrica !!Follow @glizsafrica 🔥 🔥
At the age of 7, ▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓ also known as ▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓ has already broken several records and has became the fastest boy in the country, showing early signs of possibly becoming the next Usain Bolt.
.
TAG 3 friends that need to see this
👍 Like, 🔔 Follow, and Comment

8 likes
MARCH 2

Add a comment...

## Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math



13-year old ▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓ is considered having an 'electric brain'. She was able to solve 17 mathematics problems in a space of one minute. Made the record at the annual Cowbellpedia Mathematics TV quiz.

@kishlb

one_world_dawili · Follow

one_world_dawili The genius is here once again after making another history.
▓▓▓▓ you must be in the Guinness Book of Record. You're such an amazing child. Go higher and make AFRICANS proud.
.
.
.
#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blacklivesmatter✊ #love #photography #photooftheday
7w

▓▓▓▓ what were the questions

999 likes
JANUARY 23

Add a comment...

## Black Engineer Develops Patented Solar Power Technology Being Used By HBCUs

f Share | 1.15k | Tweet | Pin | Mail

Solar-powered workstations developed by Matthew N. Portis are already being used by several HBCUs across the country including Bowie State University and the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). His other clients include Shell Oil Company and the City of Orlando Florida.

Matthew N. Portis, founder of SolGreen

**unityispowerforall** • Follow · · ·

**unityispowerforall** SolGreen is the first and only Black-owned and operated company to develop and bring to market innovative clean technology solutions for communities internationally.
.
.
Founded by inventor and engineer Matthew N. Portis, the company has installed their Evoida Solar Power Workstations at several HBCUs including Bowie State University and UDC, and they have just recently installed their 80th workstation at Park of the Americas in the City of Orlando, Florida.

5w

132 likes
JANUARY 31

Add a comment...

## Black surgeon successfully performed the first ever transplant surgery to cure deafness.

**Kelebogile**
@MsKelebogile

Professor Mashudu Tshifularo. Say his name!

**news_hubb** • Follow · · ·

**news_hubb** things they dont want the world to know@ we are successful in alot of things but it doesnt make it to the news👤👤.!!follow @news_hubb !! #instadaily .
.
.
.
.
#instagood #blackexcellence #love #love

1w

51 likes
7 DAYS AGO

Add a comment...

46

## Entrepreneurship

**Brooklyn Business Owner Found A Way To Save Money Then Used That To Create Her Company**

de.african.daughter • Follow

de.african.daughter Growing up in Brooklyn KeishaWalker knew how to do hair but she always spent tons of money to do her own hair, so she started a hair business and now owns "Topnotch Attration" selling hair extensions among others. She wants to influence black girls by shuttering the myth that only white business are successful. ❤.

19 likes

FEBRUARY 3

Add a comment...

**20-year-old Kennedy Ekezie has been honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, for raising over $2 million worth of grants to start a mentorship programme for young Africans all over the world.**

men who inspire

unityispowerforall • Follow

unityispowerforall Hardwork pays💯💯💯. Congratulations man👏 👏👏 !!Follow @accomplishmentofblacks !! #blacksnews

#melanin #blackpower #blackhistory #blackpeople #blacklove #blackexcellence #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #BlackGirlsRock

11w

That's will Smith pause

15,582 likes

DECEMBER 20, 2019

Add a comment...

## Racism in the US

**Experience of Racism**

**Illinois Prison Banned Books On Black History And Empowerment From Inmate Program** @w_w_r

stronger_together_we_s • Follow •••

**stronger_together_we_stand** In Illinois 3 out of every 4 inmates are black, yet, an Illinois prison banned an inmate education program from using books discussing black history or empowerment due to their "racial" content.

According to the Chicago Tribune, officials at Danville Correctional Center had removed 200 books from a prison library and banned for use in the education program . Removed were "several classic books of African American history, including The Souls of Black Folk, the anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin and the memoir of former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass."

**643 likes**
FEBRUARY 6

Add a comment...                    Post



**Why I refused to drive alone to Mississippi without my man👰🏼👰🏽 Yes this is real and yes I know it's 2020😅**

infinityfemme • Follow •••

**infinityfemme** There are alot of racist out there. Check the note out. So apparently blacks are restricted from movement at night👤👤 . This is ridiculous. !!Follow @blacks_news !! #nature .
.
.
.
.
#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blacklivesmatter #racism #igdaily #igers

7w

**997 likes**
JANUARY 18

Add a comment...                    Post

**Anti-Racism Posts**

**StanceGrounded** @_SJPeace_ ·
First day back to school
8 y/o named Christian saw a kid balled up in a corner crying, so he went to console him, held his hand & walked him inside school. He didn't know connor was autistic and was overwhelmed with everything going on around him, HE IS A HERO! 😏

news_hubb · Follow

news_hubb Beautiful heart❤️ ❤️ ❤️ .!!Follow @news_hubb !!

#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blackpanther #blackmagic #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #blackexcellence #ryancoogler #blackpower #blackgirlsrock #nipseyhussle #love #wakandaforever #blackandproud #malcolmx #viral #explorepage #melanin #peace #gucci #jayz #theblackpantherparty

likes

Add a comment...

Thanks for that. So glad it's dead now.

**Mutinda** 👶 @StefanMutinda
Killing racism with one photo.

😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡😡

unityispowerforall · Follow

unityispowerforall Have y'all seen racism I haven't ·· 💜💜💜💜 !!Follow @accomplishmentofblacks !! #blacksnews

#melanin #blackpower #blackhistory #blackpeople #blacklove #blackexcellence #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #BlackGirlsRock

8w

8w  Reply

20,879 likes
JANUARY 9

Add a comment...

**Inter and Intra-Ethnic Tensions**

Hispanic Immigrant Family Faces Hate Crime Charges For Taking Turns Torturing Black American Boy That Their Daughter Was Hiding In Her Closet

unityispowerforall • Follow

unityispowerforall The way she said "They grabbed a rope to try and calm him down..." 😭 😂 #TeamDL #wtf #Repost @thesavoyshow with @get_repost

The parents of a 15-year-old California girl are facing hate crime charges after police say they kidnapped and assaulted a black american boy they found hiding in the daughter's bedroom closet.

San Bruno Police arrested the girl's stepfather, Wilfredo Amaya; mother Haydee Arguello; and biological father Luisandor Suarez after it's alleged that they physically abused the young man, who's African-American, and threatened to kill him, San Francisco's

163 views
AUGUST 28, 2019

Add a comment...

## Privilege and violence in the US

**White Privilege**



Dentist and his wife are SPARED jail after keeping their disabled, 14-year-old daughter locked in a CAGE for a month and denying her food and water

By Valerie Edwards For Dailymail.com and Associated Press
15:56 26 Feb 2020, updated 16:25 26 Feb 2020

whatz_trending_ • Follow

also being molested...but when you're pale you can stay of jail 🦶

#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blacklivesmatter #blackexcellence #kobe #love #beautiful #family #selfie #photooftheday #instagood #fashion #lashes #instafashion #fashion #model

3d

That's true but if it was a black person he would get 30 something years

1h  Reply

4 likes
3 DAYS AGO

Add a comment...

de.african.daughter • Follow

de.african.daughter According to the National Center For Missing And Exploited Children, there were around 613,000 missing persons cases that were reported last year in the United States. Black women comprise around 7% of the entire population, yet the estimated number of them who've gone missing, including girls, is 64,000 which is a bit more than 10% of those missing in the entire country. WHAT IS GOING ON? WHY IS THE MEDIA NOT REPORTING THESE STORIES. WHAT SHOULD WE DO? ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! MUST READ. .

18 likes

DECEMBER 11, 2019

Add a comment...

**64,000 BLACK WOMEN ARE CURRENTLY MISSING IN THE U.S AND NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT!**

WARNING: IF WE CAN FIND THE PERSON AND OR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE THIER ABDUCTION...MYSELF (FARRAH GRAY) AND MANY



Free Awaken
February 4

This photo is a deeper reflection of the disparities between black and white Americans with regards to the judicial system and law enforcement. And its simply sickening 😟

INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

5

21 Shares

## Police Brutality



**Police release video of officer handcuffing and arresting 6-year-old girl**
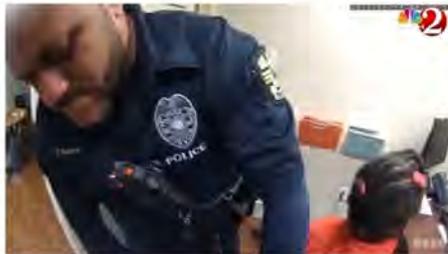
unityispowerforall · Follow

unityispowerforall Video has finally been released showing a traumatized and sobbing 6-year-old Black girl being handcuffed, arrested and taken to jail in Orlando, Florida, in Sept. 2019. The girl was also reportedly photographed and fingerprinted like a hardened criminal.

This is so sad... !!Follow @unityispowerforall !! #blacksnews
.
.

#melanin #blackpower #blackhistory #blackpeople #blacklove #blackexcellence #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlmagic #BlackGirlsRock #blackisbeautiful #blackpride

353 likes
FEBRUARY 26

Add a comment...



ssei_world_ · Follow

ssei_world_ WWMT reports that after reviewing the death of 11-year-old Norman Hood of Battle Creek, Mich., the special prosecutor assigned to the case declined to file criminal charges against the officer responsible for Hood's death:

No Charges were Filed Against Police Officer Who Killed 11-Year-Old Riding a Bike:
Infact Justice Was Not Served at all.

Share your comments @ssei_world_ .
.
.
.
.
.
.

14 likes
SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

Add a comment...

_beautifulangels • Follow

_beautifulangels FOLLOW
@blackness__unleashed !!
Real life Nazi shit. Video is circulating
from Long Island of 5 officers
assaulting a black man. This is reason
why we kneel 🧎 🧎 ❤️
#policebrutality .
.
.
.
.
.
.
#police #viral #mondays
#blackexcellence #blackdontcrack
#blacksnews #racism

5w

7,544 views
FEBRUARY 3

Add a comment...          Post

## #BlackHistoryMonth



Let us never forget Willie "Whoop Ass" Johnson, the 1st
Black Man to whoop a Klans man on camera‼️‼️
Happy Black History Month‼️👊🏾👊🏾👊🏾

_beautifulangels • Follow

_beautifulangels Willie whoop ass
Johnson 😂 Grand Rising family.
Let us all never forget this man 😝 😝
#blackhistorymonth2020
FOLLOW @blackness__unleashed .
.
.
.
.
.
.
#blackexcellence #blackhistorymonth
#blackmen #blackpanther
#blackdontcrack #love

5w

3,015 likes
FEBRUARY 4

Add a comment...

**Black Is King**
February 6 · ⊚

They were drilled through hell just in the name of equality.
All sort of abusive words were used against them, some went to jail, molested and lost their lives through this fight for #equality.
They can never be traced in the history books so we have to let them known.
!! Follow @blackisking1.
.
.
.
#blackhistorymonth #blackhistory #blackhistory365 #blackhistoryfacts #blacklivesmatter✊🏿 #love #photography #photooftheday

Let's celebrate the men & women who were bullied & sprayed & abused fighting for equality, but aren't in history books
#BlackHistoryMonth 👊🏾

👍❤️ 2                                                                     1 Share

**Blacks_eye**
February 1 · ⊚

Born a slave in 1840 in North Carolina and moved to Texas at the age of 10 as a slave. Walter Moses Burton at 29 became the 1st black elected sheriff in the US. He later became State Senator in Texas. Burton also helped found Prairie View A&M University.
#BlackHistoryMonth

👍 Like            💬 Comment            ↪ Share

\+

# Facebook, Twitter suspend Russian-linked operation targeting African Americans on social media

By **Tony Romm** and **Craig Timberg**

March 12, 2020 at 6:56 p.m. EDT

Facebook and Twitter have disabled a sophisticated Russian-linked operation designed to stoke racial tensions among African Americans in the United States, the companies announced Thursday, raising fresh alarms about Kremlin interference ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

The malicious campaign relied on a mix of fake accounts and real people, who lived in Ghana and Nigeria, some of whom appear to have been duped into thinking they were aiding a nongovernmental organization. Instead, they helped amplify a network of inauthentic accounts, pages and groups on Facebook and Twitter that shared polarizing content around social issues including race and civil rights, the tech giants said.

None of the so-called coordinated, inauthentic activity focused on the 2020 election or sought to "promote or denigrate political candidates," said Nathaniel Gleicher, the head of security policy at Facebook. But Facebook and Twitter linked the operation to some of the same Russian actors that employed similar tactics four years ago to spread falsehoods during the 2016 presidential race.

"It looks very similar to the kinds of tweets the Internet Research Agency did in 2016," said Shelby Grossman, a research scholar at Stanford Internet Observatory, referring to the troll army of the Kremlin.

"The themes are similar. The language feels similar," she continued. "I wouldn't be surprised if the motivation was dividing people in the run-up to the election."

The takedowns Thursday are likely to rattle Washington at a moment when U.S. intelligence leaders once again are sounding the alarms about suspected Russian interference. This week, a senior Trump administration official told Congress that Russia's online efforts did not explicitly seek to benefit a particular candidate. In earlier briefings, intelligence leaders told lawmakers that Russia's online efforts had "developed a preference" for Trump.

Four years ago, so-called Russian trolls seeded posts, photos and videos on major social networking sites in support of Trump, and in opposition of then-Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Many of those Facebook posts, tweets and YouTube videos also sought to stoke social and political discord, including by trying to discourage black and Latino users from voting in the first place.

In response, tech giants including Facebook and Twitter raced to bolster their digital defenses, hiring more workers to review content and investing more heavily in artificial intelligence that could spot coordinated, fake accounts. But Russia's tactics also have evolved, reflecting a better understanding

of American politics and a heightened ability to take advantage of Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites to spread falsehoods at scale.

In October, Facebook said it had removed a network of Russian-backed accounts that had posed as locals to weigh in on political issues in swing states, at times praising Trump and attacking former vice president Joe Biden. The disinformation operation — discovered in its early stages — also sought to sow divisions among a then-packed Democratic primary field.

On Thursday, Facebook and Twitter leaders said they could not speculate on whether the Russian-linked network they removed might have eventually pivoted into politics. "We know we caught this early enough on that these accounts were broadly unsuccessful in obtaining a large-scale audience," said Yoel Roth, the head of site integrity at Twitter.

The campaign disabled Thursday spanned 49 accounts and 69 pages on Facebook, with another 85 accounts on Instagram. More than 13,000 users followed one or more of the pages, and 265,000 followed one or more of the since-suspended accounts on Instagram. Twitter, meanwhile, said it discovered 71 accounts associated with the operation on its platform.

In an unusual turn, though, malicious, Russian-linked actors essentially helped set up a nongovernmental organization, called EBLA, based in Ghana. Gleicher said Russia's approach aimed to make it "harder for us to find them." Many of the details about the group's origins were reported by CNN and shared with the tech companies in advance.

The Russian operation directed much of its attention to U.S. social media users, the tech giants said. At one point, the group tried to hire an staff person in Charleston, S.C., but didn't succeed, said Darren Linvill, a communications professor at Clemson University, who said he initially found some of the suspect Twitter accounts.

An archived version of one of the closed Facebook pages, EBLA, shows that it was created Oct. 1, 2019, and posted on a range of issues apparently targeting African Americans, including on the subjects of racial violence. The contact information showed a phone number in Ghana. The page is no longer available online.

A post from Feb. 5 read, "There is always a justification for the violence a white man committed on a black man. This is because our history was thwarted the very first day we refused to put down the history by ourselves. You cannot tell someone to write your history when that person is guilty of those crimes and yet expect them to write them to suite you. #blackcommunity #martinlutherking #socialissues #BlackHistoryMonth #BlackLove."

Other posts on the page quoted the Rev. Martin Luther King and complained about what it called "hair discrimination."

Several researchers studied the disinformation campaign along with the tech companies. They noted the sophistication of the operations, which resembled previous efforts in themes but relied on new techniques for delivering them.

"Information operations' increasingly creative use of proxies, including of real groups and organizations wittingly or unwittingly participating in these campaigns, is a clear and problematic trend, we've observed over the last few months," added Camille Francois, chief innovation officer for Graphika, a network analysis firm that studies disinformation.

The firm issued its own report Thursday on the Ghana-based campaign, called "IRA in Ghana: Double Deceit," that details the similarities and differences with efforts by Russia's Internet Research Agency during and after the 2016 presidential election.

On its website, which remained online Thursday afternoon, EBLA described itself as a Ghana-based nongovernmental organization. "EBLA is a network of strong advocates of human rights. We envisage a world where individuals live freely in peace and harmony through the respect of rights," the site says.

Linvill, the Clemson professor, first found a suspicious set of accounts in July and flagged them for Twitter. After those were closed, he said, Linvill found a second mysterious set in September.

Both sets of accounts acted in ways similar to ones previously used by the Internet Research Agency to target African Americans. They pushed themes of black pride, racial oppression and police violence, interacting heavily with both American Twitter users and also accounts that Linvill had determined were Russian. The oddest thing, however, was that the location of the Twitter accounts was listed as Ghana.

Both Linvill's work and the report by Graphika highlighted the apparent tactical shift. The Ghanaian accounts were tied to real people and a real organization, rather than merely being fake accounts.

"Most of these accounts were real people, which is the best way to hide your disinformation. You just connect it to an actual human," Linvill said. "You have to go three steps to figure out these real people were being paid by Russia."

6/24/2020                    Facebook, Twitter suspend Russian-linked operation targeting African Americans on social media - The Washington Post

4/5

He also said that Ghanaian police recently shut down EBLA, whose full name is Eliminating Barriers for Liberation of Africa.

The Ghanaian group, EBLA, which did not respond to an email or calls seeking comment Thursday, posted an ad on LinkedIn seeking a "Chapter Coordinator" in Charleston. "We call on interested African Americans and other POC [people of color] to join our cause," the notice said. It listed a contact number in Ghana.

*Isaac Stanley-Becker contributed to this report.*

See surprising location of Russian troll factory
08:58

# Russian election meddling is back -- via Ghana and Nigeria -- and in your feeds

EXCLUSIVE: By Clarissa Ward, Katie Polglase, Sebastian Shukla, Gianluca Mezzofiore and Tim Lister, CNN

Updated 7:47 AM ET, Sat April 11, 2020

**Accra, Ghana (CNN)** — The Russian trolls are back -- and once again trying to poison the political atmosphere in the United States ahead of this year's elections. But this time they are better disguised and more targeted, harder to identify and track. And they have found an unlikely home, far from Russia itself.

In 2016, much of the trolling aimed at the US election operated from an office block in St. Petersburg, Russia. A months-long CNN investigation has discovered that, in this election cycle, at least part of the campaign has been outsourced -- to trolls in the west African nations of Ghana and Nigeria.

They have focused almost exclusively on racial issues in the US, promoting black empowerment and often displaying anger towards white Americans. The goal, according to experts who follow Russian disinformation campaigns, is to inflame divisions among Americans and provoke social unrest.

The language and images used in the posts -- on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram -- are sometimes graphic.

One of the Ghanaian trolls -- @africamustwake -- linked to a story from a left-wing conspiracy website and commented on Facebook: "America's descent into a fascist police state continues."

January 21 · 🌐

America's descent into a fascist police state continues.. Someone needs to take that Senator out it's ideas like this that completely make us lose faith in our government's ability to do anything at all

An image from a now-deleted Facebook page of one of the trolls touted alleged police targeting of African Americans.

Referring to a Republican state senator, the post continued: "Someone needs to take that Senator out."

On another occasion, @africamustwake tweeted: "YOU POLICE BEEN KILLING BLACKS SINCE YA RAGGEDY MOMMAS GAVE BIRTH TO U. HAPPY MLK DAY TO U HYPOCRITES."

More than 200 accounts were created by the Ghanaian trolls -- the vast majority in the second half of 2019 -- and they reached hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people worldwide.

CNN has found EBLA workers created fake social media accounts in bursts, since the group registered in June 2019. Activity stopped suddenly in February 2020 after a raid, and Twitter later suspended accounts on its platform.

● EBLA account created          ● EBLA account suspended

JUL 2019

AUG 2019

SEP 2019

Facebook and Twitter had already been looking into some of the troll accounts when CNN notified the two companies of our investigation. In a statement Thursday, Facebook said that its "subsequent assessment benefited from our collaboration with a team of journalists at CNN" and it had "removed 49 Facebook accounts, 69 Pages and 85 Instagram accounts for engaging in foreign interference."

Facebook said: "This network was in early stages of audience building and was operated by local nationals -- witting and unwitting -- in Ghana and Nigeria on behalf of individuals in Russia. It targeted primarily the United States."

Facebook says that about 13,200 Facebook accounts followed one or more of the Ghana accounts and around 263,200 people followed one or more of Instagram accounts, about 65% of whom were in the US.

Twitter told CNN that it had removed 71 accounts that had 68,000 followers. "Most were tweeting in English and presented themselves as based in the United States," it said in a statement. "The accounts -- operating out of Ghana and Nigeria and which we can reliably associate with Russia -- attempted to sow discord by engaging in conversations about social issues, like race and civil rights."

The activity uncovered by CNN had striking similarities to the Russian troll campaign of 2016, which created hundreds of accounts designed to pass as American. @africamustwake, for example, which described itself as a "Platform For #BLM #Racism #PoliceBrutality," claimed to be in Florida.

Other accounts, for example, claimed to be in Brooklyn or New Orleans.

CNN and Twitter found accounts purportedly of people across the US were being set up and run from Ghana and Nigeria.



● Location an EBLA account purported to be from

Sources: CNN, Twitter
Will Mullery, CNN

One of the accounts even pretended to be the cousin of an African American who died in police custody. The post was then shared to a Facebook group called Africans in the United States. The group told CNN it had no idea that trolls were trying to engage it.

Another also implied they were in the US, tweeting in February: "Just experienced blatant #racism in Downton (sic) Huntsville, Alabama ... Three of my black male friends were turned away because they were 'out of dress code.'"

There was a concerted effort to agitate in the US. One of the trolls -- Black People Trendz -- posted to the Facebook page of Black Lives Matter in Cincinnati. Another -- @The_black_secret -- was devoted to police shootings of African Americans. It also posted a video of a racial incident with the comment "Blacks have a right to defend themselves against Racism" that drew more than 5,000 reactions and more than 2,000 shares.

CNN worked with two Clemson University professors -- Darren Linvill and Patrick Warren -- in tracking the Ghanaian operation. Linvill said the campaign was straight out of the Russian playbook, trying to mask its efforts among groups in the US.

"They were very closely engaged in the Black Lives Matter community," he said. "They talked almost exclusively about what was happening on the streets of the United States and not on the streets of Africa."

Kailee Scales, managing director of Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, said her organization was proactive when it came to protecting its voice online. "We are walking into the 2020 election cycle with eyes wide open to the fact that international and domestic actors are striving to undermine our organizing, and we are not going to let that happen," she told CNN.

The operation's headquarters were in a walled compound in a quiet residential district near the Ghanaian capital, Accra. It had been rented by a small nonprofit group that called itself Eliminating Barriers for the Liberation of Africa (EBLA).

This building was used as the headquarters for Ghanaians posing as Americans and posting on social media.

Sixteen Ghanaians, mostly in their 20s, worked at the compound; some lived rent-free in a nearby apartment. They were issued mobile phones, not laptops, and worked around a table. The EBLA trolls communicated as a group through the encrypted Telegram app, which is rarely used in Ghana.

One of the trolls agreed to talk to CNN, so long as her identity was disguised. She said she had no idea she would be working as a Russian troll. She said that employees were given topics to post about. "So you get stories about LGBT, you get stories about police brutality, depends on what you are working," she said.

Employees would sit at this table to create posts and tweets on their phones, one worker told CNN.

The employee said they were told that the best time to tweet and post was late afternoon and at night in Ghana, times when a US audience would have been active. They were given US articles to read.

Facebook said that although the people behind the campaign had attempted to conceal their purpose and coordination, its investigation had found links to both EBLA and "individuals associated with past activity by the Russian Internet Research Agency."

The Internet Research Agency (IRA) was responsible for much of the foreign trolling activity aimed at the 2016 and 2018 US election campaigns, according to the US government. The IRA was funded by Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is so close to the Kremlin that he is nicknamed "Putin's chef."

Yevgeny Prigozhin, in Moscow in 2017, funded the 2016 IRA trolling.

A CNN request for comment from Prigozhin's holding company, Concord Management, on the Ghana trolling operation went unanswered.

The man running EBLA calls himself Mr. Amara and claims to be South African. In reality he is a Ghanaian who lives in Russia and his name is Seth Wiredu. Several of EBLA's workers said they had heard Wiredu speak Russian.

Late last year, Wiredu extended EBLA's activities to Nigeria, filling at least eight positions, including a project manager to help with "social media management." CNN uncovered the postings for two of the jobs, and a source in Nigeria confirmed that the employees shared office space in Lagos. The Nigerian accounts posted predominantly on US issues too.

And at the end of January this year, EBLA ventured even further afield. It advertised a position in Charleston, South Carolina, just as the IRA had done in 2016. The LinkedIn posting invited applicants to "join hands with our brothers and sisters world-wide, especially in the United States where POC are mostly subjected to all forms of Brutality."

The posting on LinkedIn stopped accepting applications days later.

EBLA had a website touting its advocacy work, but CNN found the photos had likely been uploaded by someone using a Cyrillic keyboard, unusual outside of Russia.

On February 6, Ghanaian security services raided the EBLA compound. On that same day the group stopped posting on the social media accounts it had created. One of the workers told CNN they were told to lie on the ground and had guns pointed at them. They were interrogated by police and the phones used to post on the fake accounts were confiscated.

When CNN visited the compound two weeks later, it appeared to have been abandoned.

In a statement to CNN, the Ghanaian security services said their Cyber Security Unit had become suspicious of EBLA's activities and believed it was engaged in "organized radicalism with links to a foreign body." They added that they had determined that "EBLA receives its funding from an anonymous source in a European country."

Ghanaian security sources subsequently told CNN that all of EBLA's funding had come from Russia.

Wiredu does not seem to have been deterred by the raid. Early in March, he called a meeting of EBLA workers. CNN observed the meeting from close by.

Seth Wiredu, seen here in a frame from a hidden camera video, said he had no idea why his offices were raided by Ghanaian security forces.

Wiredu told the workers, whom he met in several groups, that the trouble with the security services would soon pass, according to someone at the meeting. He told them they would be returning to work and should create new accounts, providing him with the passwords.

Approached by CNN after the meeting, Wiredu denied he had ever worked for the Internet Research Agency or knew Prigozhin.

"I wouldn't say I have Russian partners. I have friends ... but to call them partners wouldn't be right because I don't ask someone to come and support me," he said. He said he did translation work for many entities in Russia.

Wiredu insisted he funded EBLA from his own income and did not understand why the Ghanaian security forces had raided the compound. He said the accounts had been "talking about what is important to black people, talking about racism, talking about police brutality."

"I actually, I perceive myself as a blacksfighter. I fight for black people," Wiredu added.

Wiredu acknowledged that he had called himself Amara and pretended to be South African.

EBLA's targets in the US followed a long-established pattern, according to Linvill and Warren at Clemson, who work with US law enforcement in tracking trolling activities.

Clemson professors Darren Linvill, left, and Patrick Warren often see new fake accounts replacing any that are shut down.

"There's a long history, actually dating back to the Soviet Union, of Russia emphasizing the real and serious racial divisions that exist in the United States. But also trying to inflame those divisions," Warren said.

According to an indictment released in February 2018 by special counsel Robert Mueller, Russian operatives working for the Internet Research Agency used social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram -- including ones called "Woke Blacks" and "Blacktivists" -- to urge Americans to vote for third-party candidates or sit out the election entirely.

This building in St. Petersburg, Russia, became known as the "troll factory."

Three months later, Facebook removed 70 Facebook and 65 Instagram accounts -- as well as 138 Facebook Pages -- that were controlled by the IRA. Facebook also took down other Russian operations not linked to IRA in 2018.

CNN's investigation found the accounts created in Ghana were consistently coordinated, posting on the same topic within hours of each other. Instagram accounts appear to have done especially well: the most popular Instagram account built a following of more than 25,000, three times its Twitter audience.

One EBLA-branded image was retweeted by a Twitter account with 126,000 followers, greatly amplifying the group's message.

Wiredu closely monitored the impact of the expanding operation, according to several EBLA employees who spoke to CNN. One of them said they provided their passwords to him and every week had to report details of the reach of their accounts. They used Twitter analytics to examine their growth and were told they would get bonuses and higher pay if their accounts grew significantly.

Some of the trolls' posts incorporated video with the EBLA logo burned in. The @AfricaMustWake Twitter account posted a video in December carrying the EBLA logo, showing alleged police brutality in Chicago.

In November, another account -- @AfricaThen -- posted an EBLA-labeled video with the caption: "A female white supremacist went into a Popeyes using the N-word at the employees.. and she ended up getting a Grand Slam breakfast #Racism #kickitout #CHANGE."

## What's next in Ghana -- and elsewhere

It's unclear whether Wiredu will succeed in reconstituting the EBLA operation after the February raid. He certainly intends to try, according to one of the EBLA workers, who told CNN that he had encouraged them to begin new accounts.

It might make your operation harder to identify overall.

More broadly, Russia has certainly shown growing interest in Africa -- using a mix of state power and private interests. Those private interests include Russian companies keen to exploit Africa's energy and commodity resources, as well as provide private military contractors to bolster local security forces.

A CNN investigation last year found that companies linked to Prigozhin were active in the Central African Republic, training its army and police forces and winning concessions to extract diamonds and gold. Prigozhin companies or contractors have also been present in Libya, Sudan and Mozambique.

They have also tried to influence the politics of several African countries.

Last October, Facebook closed networks of accounts that were actively targeting a total of eight African countries. It said that: "Although the people behind these networks attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation connected these campaigns to entities associated with Russian financier Yevgeny Prigozhin."

Russia has shown increasing interest in Africa, including in Accra, Ghana, where these fishing boats sit.

Russia's continuing interest in Africa as a platform for expanding its influence has taken on a new complexion with the trolling enterprise in Ghana -- demonstrating an adaptability and persistence that will cause deep concern among US intelligence agencies and the technology companies.

US Sen. Mark Warner, vice-chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in response to CNN's reporting: "I've said for years now that it would be foolish to believe there was only the one well-publicized IRA facility in St. Petersburg. This new reporting is a reminder of the continuing threat we face from Russia and its continuing efforts to divide and manipulate us on social media."

suspended them." But a week later, there was another set of accounts to replace them.

*Journalist Manasseh Azure Awuni in Ghana, CNN's Stephanie Busari in Nigeria and CNN's Darya Tarasova in Russia contributed to this story, which was reported from Accra, Ghana; London; Moscow; Lagos, Nigeria, and Clemson, South Carolina. The video was shot by CNN's Scott McWhinnie and edited by CNN's Oscar Featherstone.*

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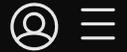
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