



“We Charge Racism” An App as a Border Wall

CBP One App’s facial recognition does not work with darker-skinned peoples, including Haitians, Africans, and indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans.

Matthew Bowler/KPBS

In January this year, the Biden administration announced that the CBP One App would be used to streamline the process for asylum seekers at the Mexican border to schedule appointments. In fact, it has done the opposite, slowing down the process and raising new barriers to entry that systematically disadvantage the most vulnerable.

Priority Africa Network (PAN) is calling for an end to use of this technology which tilts the odds against asylum-seekers with less education, less access to technology, and darker skin colors.

BACKGROUND

CBP One was first introduced in 2020 to facilitate border traffic for cargo shipments. But the process of adapting the software for managing appointments for asylum seekers was sloppy, with many bugs causing the app to repeatedly crash. Imagine the most frustrating smartphone issue you’ve ever encountered and then add running for your life to the mix.

Moreover, one of the features required applicants to take a live video selfie to prove that they were real people rather than photographs of people. ***This facial recognition did not work well with darker-skinned peoples.*** In February the Guardian Newspaper noted that *“the algorithm problems are sharply reducing the number of Black asylum seekers who can fill out their applications.”*

Despite all these documented problems and a lawsuit filed by immigrant rights organizations in July, the Biden administration still refuses to give up this alleged solution that is now part of the problem.

Priority Africa Network (PAN) is an Oakland-based non-profit that supports and advocates for Black immigrant communities in the Bay Area. Early in 2023, PAN joined the Border Taskforce, a coalition of humanitarian and legal advisors focused on supporting Black migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.