

folks' standards, Reverend Wright's hunger for the spotlight was detracting from Obama's campaign. This feeling was expressed by Nas, who rhymed, "You ain't right, Jeremiah Wrong pastor" ("Black President"). Despite distancing himself from Wright, Obama made it clear that he was not about to distance himself from "the Black community." As we enter 2012, however, certain segments of the Black community may be the ones distancing themselves from Barack Obama as an increasing number of vocal Black critics continue to feel that Obama has neglected the concerns of African Americans.

80. From his song "Daddy Fat Sax" on one of the best Hip Hop albums of 2010, *Sir Lucious Left Foot: The Son of Chico Dusty* (Purple Ribbon Records and Def Jam Recordings).

81. If you don't recall this, check the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0QAwvR28>. Last accessed: 09-25-11. Hillary Clinton, at the time (May 2008), was not willing to back out of the race. Further, the presumptive nominee, Barack Obama, had already received multiple death threats. While many in her party were pushing her to quit for the sake of "party unity," she pushed on, saying, "You know, my husband did not wrap up the nomination in 1992 until he won the California primary somewhere in the middle of June, right? We all remember Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in June in California." While her campaign brushed off accusations of "dirty politics" as ludicrous, others couldn't help but think of the move as calculated.

82. Davey D, January 30, 2009. See note 26. While this captured the sentiment of Davey D and many in Hip Hop, Davey D has become a very vocal critic of Barack Obama and what he sees as his lack of concern for Black communities. Some have even repeated Kanye West's famous comments about George W. Bush ("George Bush does not care about Black people.") and replaced his name with Obama's. In the Black tradition, the Trickster figure uses his guile and intelligence to defeat the White power structure. Obama, on the other hand, ran one helluva campaign, in which he apparently "tricked" much of both White and Black America (as well as progressives of all stripes, many who are now embarrassed and/or embittered because they were among the "believers"). Despite everything that they knew about politics—namely, that "change" almost never happens from the top-down, that politicians do what they do best (i.e., get elected), and so on—they somehow believed Obama would be different. Those in Hip Hop who expressed a healthy skepticism toward Obama's ability—or any president's ability, for that matter—to fulfill sweeping promises of change were ahead of the curve. Take this excerpt from an open letter to the president penned by Brooklyn MC Talib Kweli: "If someone asked me, I would explain why I didn't vote. It was pageantry and I wasn't with it. This was all before Barack Obama threw his hat in the ring. My criticism of the political system is that it siphons all rational thought because you have to be all things to all people. You can stand for anything doing that... I am not delusional about what the office of the president represents..." (quoted in William Jelani Cobb's *Barack Obama and the Paradox of Progress*, New York: Walker, 2010, 110). Or as S'ic.Man from dead prez put it earlier in this chapter—even more strongly—"Even if Barack Obama wins, Uncle Sam still ain't our friend." As we ramp up for the 2012 presidential election, it'll be interesting to watch Hip Hop's evolving stance towards Barack Obama and the role Hip Hop will or will not play this time around.

6

Change the Game

Language, Education, and the Cruel Fallout of Racism

None of us—black, white, Latino, or Asian—is immune to the stereotypes that our culture continues to feed us, especially stereotypes about black criminality, black intelligence, or the black work ethic. In general, members of every minority group continue to be measured largely by the degree of our assimilation—how closely speech patterns, dress, or demeanor conform to the dominant white culture—and the more that a minority strays from these external markers, the more he or she is subject to negative assumptions.¹

—Barack Obama

The language, only the language.... It is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language.... It's terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently damaging.... This is a really cruel fallout of racism.²

—Toni Morrison

Over the last few years, we have been contacted by journalists seeking "expert" linguistic opinions on President Obama's speech. Early into Obama's first term, a writer for one of the more progressive Internet news websites asked us if we would comment on the "growing trend" of Black parents wanting their children not to "be like Mike" but rather to

"talk like Barack." Or in her words, "to speak standard English." After speaking with her for only a few minutes, we agreed on two facts: One, Barack Obama was indeed a skilled speaker; two, schools continued to fail in their teaching of "standard English" to Black students. Eventually, though, it became clear that she held some pretty strong biases against "African American English." After a little more probing, she finally recognized that what she was secretly hoping for was that "Barack Obama's public speaking abilities [would] influence African Americans to move away from African American English," since this "incorrect" and "unacceptable" way of speaking was "holding them back." When we asked her to consider that it was a helluva thing to have your language thought of as a handicap, she insisted that she didn't necessarily agree with that view, but that she was genuinely concerned about the educational plight of African American students. This well-intentioned insistence on the part of White folks (and many middle-class Black folks) that working-class Black people *need* to change the way they talk so that White America can accept them is troublesome for many reasons, not the least of which are its racist and classist overtones.

First, it is questionable whether or not it was even a "growing trend" that Black parents wanted their children "to speak standard English." Far as we know, Black parents have always wanted their kids to speak "standard English," at least for instrumental purposes like doing well in school or getting a job. Second, it's more complicated than her one-way push toward "standard English" would suggest. In our own work we have found that many parents want their children to be fluent in multiple language varieties, including Black Language and "standard English."³ Rather than seeking a linguist to endorse her own views, we suggested that she might consider talking to members of the Black communities that we study and participate in. Folks certainly respect President Obama for his mastery of "standard English," but he is more often admired as a linguistic role model for his ability to shift in and out of different ways of speaking.

Third, while this journalist wanted Black Americans to abandon Black Language in an effort to "talk like Barack," the irony is that Barack Obama himself was employing Black Language in an effort to "talk like the people." In other words, unlike this journalist, he recognized Black ways of speaking as valued symbols of identity and solidarity for members of the Black community. From the basketball courts to the campaign trail to the pews of Trinity United Church of Christ and the barbershops of South Side Chicago, Barack regularly switched back and forth between multiple ways of speaking—*without devaluing any of them*. It is in this sense that he serves as a linguistic role model not just for Black Americans but for all Americans.

Y'all Don't Hear Us Though: Recognizing the Complexity and Richness of Black Language

One of our major goals in this book has been to show how we need to *language* race—to think about the linguistic dimensions of race—in order to move the national conversation on race forward. From our analysis of the way Americans describe Barack Obama's language to the *articulate* controversy to the complexities of the "Race Speech" and the "fist bump" fiasco, we have shown throughout this book how Black Language continues to be monitored and maligned in the American public sphere. In this chapter, we shall see how the complexity and richness of Black Language often goes completely unnoticed and is regularly censored in American society. In particular, we see how Black folks' use of Black Language can often lead to misinterpretation and conflict in America's schools and White public spaces. Importantly, we also argue that the critical linguistic perspective that we adopt in this book can and should be taught in schools in order to bring about social change.

While differing rules of language use certainly play a role in Black-White communicative conflicts, that's only half the story. These conflicts often occur in sociopolitical contexts where communities are at odds, not for linguistic reasons but for economic, political, and social ones.⁴ Any honest look at Black-White communicative conflicts must take into account the persistent racial tension that exists between communities in the United States and the White cultural hegemony that undergirds it. It's no secret that many White and other Americans still view Black Language through the ideological lens of Black intellectual and moral inferiority—the overtly racist message boards following every single online news story about Black Language can testify to that. Although little acknowledged in these public discussions, what usually lies behind comments like "Black Language is nothing but a lazy, ignorant way of speaking" are racist beliefs about Black people themselves as "lazy" and "ignorant." (Hatin on a particular language is linked to hating its speakers, straight up.)⁵

The sad and twisted irony for linguists, of course, is that those who refer to Black Language as "ignorant" are only revealing their own ignorance of basic linguistic principles. As we stated in chapter 1, Black Language is a linguistic system born out of a Creolization process that merged African and European languages and ways of using them. As the linguistic legacy of the African slave trade, it is oftentimes more complex grammatically and functionally than any other form of American English. This is one of the reasons—aside from America's obsession with anything Black folks say or do—why it's the most studied language variety in the United States. Of course, any sociolinguist coulda told you that, but y'all don't hear us though.

Despite linguists' best efforts to reach the public, most folks reading this book right now are unaware that Black Language is a complex system of structure and use that is distinct from White Mainstream English in the US. While it is true that Black Language shares much of its structure with White Mainstream English, there are many aspects of Black Language syntactic (grammar) and phonological (pronunciation) systems that mark it as distinct from that variety. If we examine syntax alone, sociolinguists have described numerous features of Black Language, such as copula absence (as we saw in Barack Obama's use of "Nah, we Ø straight" for "Nah, we are straight" in chapter 1), invariant *be* for habitual aspect ("He *be* talkin a lot in class," meaning "He usually/regularly/sometimes talks a lot in class") and equatives ("We *be* them Bay boys" for "We are them Bay boys"), *steady* as an intensified continuative ("She *steady* prayin her son come back from Iraq," meaning "She is intensely, consistently and continuously praying her son comes back from Iraq"), stressed *been* to mark remote past ("I *been* told you not to trust them," meaning "I told you a long time ago not to trust them"), *be done* to mark the future or conditional perfect ("By the end of the day, I *be done* collected \$600!" meaning "By the end of the day, I will have collected \$600!"), aspectual *stay* ("She *stay* up in my business," meaning "She is always getting into my business"), 3rd person singular present tense—s absence ("I know who *run this* household!" for "I know who *runs this* household!"), and possessive—s absence ("I'm braidin *Talesha* hair" for "I'm braiding Talesha's hair"). These next features of BL syntax come from Obama's book, *Dreams from My Father*, where he represents the voices of various people in his life: *multiple negation* ("You can't help folks that ain't gonna make it nohow" for "You can't help folks that ain't gonna make it anyhow"), *negative inversion* ("Ain't nothing gonna change" for "Nothing is gonna change"), and generalization of *was* to use with plural and second person subjects ("Tell me we wouldn't be treated different if we was white" for "if we were white"), among several other features.⁶

While most sociolinguists have focused on grammatical and pronunciation patterns of Black Language, many also know that it cannot be defined as merely a checklist of features that are distinct from White Mainstream English.⁷ Black Language is not just a set of "deviations" from "the standard"; it is a system in its own right and has been analyzed on its own terms, not just in relation to some "idealized" form of White speech. Aside from having an ever-evolving lexicon, speakers of Black Language may participate in numerous linguistic practices and cultural modes of discourse such as *signifyin* (and *bustin, crackin, cappin and dissin*), *playin the dozens, call and response, tonal semantics, battlin* and *entering the cipher*, and the

artful use of direct and indirect speech, among others.⁸ Black Language, then, refers both to a set of grammatical rules as well as to the way Black folks use language on a day-to-day basis.

While Black Language is not controversial to linguists, racially charged national firestorms over Black Language occur about once every 20 years (with, of course, local fires burnin in between). Who can forget the madness that broke out after "the King case" in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1977, when the lawsuit was filed, to the time of the trial in 1979? Or more recently, during "the Oakland Ebonics controversy" in 1997?⁹ As the saying goes, if we don't learn from our history we're destined (and in this case, doomed) to repeat it.

"Inconvenient Truths": Disrupting White Linguistic Hegemony (No Matter How Well-Meaning)

To begin with, we must acknowledge certain inconvenient truths (shout-out to Al Gore) about American society. For us, there is no skirting the fact that American society remains one in which, as Barack Obama put it, "members of every minority group continue to be measured largely by the degree of [their] assimilation—how closely their speech patterns, dress, or demeanor conform to the dominant white culture." The cultural dominance of Whiteness—the fact that White people consider themselves the "standard" by which "Others" are measured—has real and tangible effects on the lives of people of Color.

As folks who study Whiteness argue, Whites can exercise power through overt (obvious) and covert (hidden) racist practices. Covert practices—the focus of this chapter—are of special interest because they often reveal racist ideologies that even the racist may not be aware of. The fact that it is the language and communicative norms of those in power, in any society, that tend to be labeled as "standard," "official," "normal," "appropriate," "respectful," and so on, often goes unrecognized, particularly by the members of the dominating group. In our case, White Mainstream English and White ways of speaking become the invisible—or better, inaudible—norms of what educators and uncritical scholars like to call academic English, the language of school, the language of power, or communicating in academic settings.

The following conversation with a well-meaning high school teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area serves as a good starting point for our discussion of how Black Language (and its speakers) are viewed in America's schools. Below, the teacher is describing the communication goals of the school and the language and communication behavior of her Black students.

As you read, check the key words and phrases that reveal this teacher's language attitudes:

TEACHER: [We] have a lot of presentation standards, so like this list of, you know, what you *should* be doing when you're having like an oral presentation—like you should speak slowly, speak loudly, speak clearly, make eye contact, use body language, those kinds of things, and it's all written out into a rubric, so when the kids have a presentation, you grade on each element. And so, I mean, in that sense, they've worked with developing communication. I mean, I think the thing that teachers work with, or combat the most...is definitely like issues with standard English versus vernacular English. Um, like, if there was like one of the *few* goals I had this year was to get kids to stop sayin', um, "he was, she was."

ALIM: They was?

T: "They was. We be." Like, those kinds of things and so we spent a lot of time working with that and like recognizing, "Okay, when you're with your friends you can say *whatever you want* but...this is the way it is. I'm sorry, but that's just the way." And they're like, "Well, you know, it doesn't make sense to me. This sounds right." "She was." Like, and that's just what they've been used to and it's just...

A: Well, "she was" is right, right? You mean, like, "They was"?

T: "They was."

A: And "we was" and that kinda thing.

T: Yeah, "we was." Everything is just "was."

A: [Laughter]

T: And like, just trying to help them to be able to differentiate between what's acceptable... There's a lot of "ain't", "they was," "we ain't not."

A: [Laughter]

T: And they can't codeswitch that well.

A: Uh-huh.

T: Um, and I have to say it's kind of disheartening because like despite all that time that's been spent focusing on grammar, like, I don't really see it having helped enormously. Like, if I stop them in class and they're like, you know, "The Europeans, they was really blah-de-blah." and I'd be like, "Oh, they was?" And they'd be like, "they were," like they'll correct themselves, but it's not to the point where it's natural... They're like, "Why does it matter?"

A: "You knew what I said, right?"

T: Yeah... I'm not sure they understand *why* it's necessary.

A: Do you have any other ideas about language at the school, like maybe the way the kids speak to themselves versus they way they speak in class, or do you notice...

T: Well, I mean, of course, they're not gonna be as free as when they're speaking to each other when they're speaking to me. I mean, I guess the only thing is not so much spoken language as it's like unspoken language, like tone, like a lot of attention is paid to like tone and body language, in terms of respectful attitudes... For a lot of kids, they don't see the difference. They're like [loud voice and direct speech] "Yeah, I just asked you to give me my grade. Like, what's the big deal?" And I'm like, "You just ordered me. I mean, you talked to me like that." Like, it's like, [loud again] "You didn't give me a grade!" like that, it's very abrasive, but they don't realize that it's abrasive. And so, I mean, it's just like, I guess, teaching them like the nuances of like when you're talking with people, what's appropriate? Should you be sitting up, or should you be kinda leaning over [and she leans in her chair].

A: [Laughter]

T: Like that your body language and your facial features like speak just as loudly if not *more* loudly than what you *actually* say.¹⁰... I mean, just even bringing awareness to that, like, it's upsetting to them and it's like shocking to them that we'll comment on that, like, maybe their parents let them get away with that and speak to them that way and having to be like, "Hey, you know what, like, maybe your parents let you, but here that's never acceptable."¹¹ Like, there's just so many—I mean, thinking about it, it's just, it's asking a lot of them to do, not only to speak standard English but to know all these other like smaller nuances that they've never experienced before and never had to think about. Like, it's probably on some level pretty overwhelming to them to have to deal with all of these things at once. Because, I mean, their parents say "they was."

A: Yeah, is there any talk about what they're being expected to do, and what they do ordinarily, in the community, in the home, or anything?

T: Um, I mean, not officially or regularly, but I'll always be like, "I know you might speak this way at home, but in an academic setting, or if you're interviewing for a job, or if you're applying

to college, and you talk to someone like that, they will like not even give you the time of day."

A: Do they ever ask why?

T: Yeah, they're just like, you know, "Why?" and I'm like, "I don't know!" [Laughter!] "You know, that's just the way that it is! You have to learn how to play the game guys! I'm sorry."

A: Right, and I can see that being such an inadequate answer for a student who doesn't care about "they was" or "they were," being like, "What's the difference? What's the big deal? Like what's the overall picture?"

T: Right, and I don't know how to provide that.

A: Yeah.

"We Ain't Not": Hearing What's Not Said and Missing What Is

Despite its grammatical complexity, the language of the Black child has consistently been viewed as something to eradicate, even by the most well-meaning teachers. In fact, this particular teacher is genuine about her commitment to seeing as many of her students attend four-year colleges as possible. And when she states, "I have to say it's kind of disheartening because like despite *all* that time that's been spent focusing on grammar, like, I don't really see it having helped enormously," one gets the sense that she is actually disheartened and saddened by her lack of results.

What teachers like this one are probably not aware of is how their attitudes and approaches to Black Language uphold White cultural and linguistic hegemony. Let's take a minute to break it down. One, it is revealing that the teacher describes the language of her Black students as the thing that teachers "*combat* the most." Her attempt to stamp out the language patterns of her Black students has been "one of the *few goals*" she has had throughout that academic year. Two, the teacher not only works to eradicate the language patterns of her Black students but responds negatively to what she calls "unspoken language," or the students' "tone." Black students and their ways of speaking are described with adjectives like *abrasive* and *not respectful*.¹²

Three, as many of you probably noticed, the teacher points out her students' failure to speak "standard English," while failing to realize that her own speech variety—which some would label as White California Valley Girl Talk—is not exactly what you would call "standard."¹³ The teacher also fails to make several linguistic distinctions in the speech of the students,

implying that Black Language has a random system of negation ("we ain't not" is actually not found in Black Language or any other language variety in the United States) and erroneously pointing out "he was" and "she was" as use of incorrect Black Language. Further, she's also not aware of the stylistic sensitivity in the use of *was* and *were*. When the teacher says, rather exasperatedly, "Everything is just 'was,'" she is not hearing the subtle stylistic alternation of *was* and *were* that Black Language speakers employ as they move through different contexts and situations.

Somehow, despite the vitality of Black Language, teachers continue hearing what's not said and missing what is. After years of workin on the frontlines of education, as teachers and as teacher-researchers from Detroit to Philly to the San Francisco Bay Area, there's "one thing that we know for sure" (word to Oprah): Teachers' language attitudes have remained remarkably consistent over the last several decades, particularly in terms of the language of their Black students. By no means is this teacher alone in her biases.

"Cuz We Like It!": Black Linguistic Flexibility and Creativity

Contrary to the teacher's comments that her Black students could not "codeswitch" (we use the term *styleshift*)—that is, shift in and out of different ways of speaking—our sociolinguistic research with youth at this same school demonstrates clearly that Black youth possess a wide range of linguistic styles. These results are outlined in great detail in Alim's *You Know My Steez: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Styleshifting in a Black American Speech Community*.¹⁴ Like all speakers, Black youth vary their speech style based on factors like topic, age, situation, and so on. But they also vary their speech based on who they're speaking to, particularly in terms of the person's race, gender, and their cultural knowledge (familiarity with Hip Hop, in particular).

Furthermore, while many youth can learn "standard English" grammar, they resist the constant and unrelenting imposition of White linguistic norms by their teachers. It's one thing to learn grammar rules but quite another to be rewarded for "sounding White" (as if there's something inherently wrong with "sounding Black"). These youth grew up in speech communities where folks are, as Toni Morrison put it, in love with "the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them." So, rather than take their teachers and other White folks for their linguistic role models, they choose folks who they see as more linguistically creative. They select speakers who, rather than follow a fixed

set of rules, know the rules well enough to bend them in ways that are pleasing to them. Take this example from three youth at the well-meaning teacher's school:

LATASHA: Yeah, like the way I talk to my teacher ain't the same way I talk with the 3L Click.

ALIM: 3L Click? What's that?

L: All of our names begin with "L," so we named our click after that, the 3L Click. It's me, LaToya, and Lamar.

A: And how is the way y'all talk different from the way you talk to the teacher?

L: Well, it's like, you know that rapper, Nelly?

A: Yeah, yeah.

L: How he say everything like "urrrr," like for "here" he'll be like "hurrrr"?

A: Yeah! [Laughing] "I ain't from round hurrrr!"

L: [Laughing] That's how we try to talk!

A: Why, though?!

L: Cuz we like it!

When Latasha's linguistic role models, Nelly and the St. Lunatics, bust onto the Hip Hop scene, their language was a major part of their popularity. They often emphasized words that rhymed with "urrrr" to highlight a well-known (and sometimes stigmatized) aspect of southern/south midland pronunciation. As we see from Latasha's comments, she and her northern California-based 3L Click borrow this phonological feature of Black Language to play with different regional and linguistic identities. Although teachers may not recognize it, Black youth are often more interested in exploiting differences between "standard English" and "Black Language"—as well as interregional differences in Black Language styles—than they are with simply mimicking White ways of speaking.

In addition to preferring a more fluid, flexible approach to linguistic structure, youth who grow up in Black speech communities also appreciate the verbal art that's involved in numerous language games. Language is not just merely a means of communication; its use is meant to "make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself." Students at the well-meaning teacher's school often engage in various verbal games, such as *battlin* and *hush mode*. *Battlin* is a form of Black verbal dueling associated with Hip Hop Culture and the verbal art of improvisational rhyming. *Hush mode* is a game associated mostly closely with Black girls' interaction, argumentation, and play. In *battlin*, the object is to outsmart your opponent through linguistic wit and creativity, while in *hush*

mode the goal is to leave your opponent dumbfounded and speechless. Both games highlight the value placed on verbal creativity and competition in the Black speech community.¹⁵

Unfortunately, teachers who are not familiar with Black Culture and Language often misunderstand these linguistic practices. For example, while Black youth place extreme value on the verbal inventiveness and competition involved in *battlin*, teachers broke up the biggest rhyme battle in the school because, as one student relayed, "Whenever they see a group of Black folks they automatically think it's a fight!" One teacher described the event in these words, "Whatever they were doing, it wasn't appropriate on school grounds." Rather than capitalizing on the skills displayed in these improvisational verbal exchanges, the teachers viewed these Black linguistic competitions as *violence*. This misinterpretation is particularly poignant when one considers that the youth themselves define *battlin* as "taking the place of actual fights." Rather than a physical fight, students gain status in their peer group by exchanging blows in a game of verbal oneupsmanship.

The stylistic flexibility of Black youth, their various verbal art genres, and the pleasure some derive from pushing the envelope of the English language could fill—have filled—volumes. Rather than interpreting Black language behavior through the lens of Black inferiority, ignorance, or violence, these creative language practices should be utilized for educational purposes. There is a growing community of language and literacy scholars working to connect the verbal skills that Black youth display outside the classroom with the verbal skills required inside the classroom.¹⁶ Yet, it's not only that well-meaning teachers are unaware of these Black linguistic practices. They also have no way to critically engage them (and much of the scholarship is unhelpful on that point). This places teachers in a tough situation. In the case of our teacher, despite loving her students and genuinely wanting the best for them, she continues to feel as if she has failed them. Or as one teacher put it, capturing the frustration shared by many, "I feel like I'm banging my head against the wall with this standard English thing." When faced with difficult questions, they are left with unsatisfying retorts like, "I know you talk this way at home, but in an academic setting, or if you're interviewing for a job, or if you're applying to college, and you talk to someone like that, they will like not even give you the time of day."

Sensing that this might be an inadequate answer for her more critical students, we asked if her students ever push her to explain why particular varieties are associated with power, prestige, and upward mobility while their variety is not. The teacher's answer to them is a frustrated and apologetic "I don't know! You know, that's just the way it is! You have to learn how to play the game guys! I'm sorry." Unfortunately, we've been stuck in

that same sorry place for decades (at least since the push in the 1960s for racial integration when Black Language began to be seen as a "problem"). Unless we come up with better answers, students will continue to resist the imposition of what are essentially White ways of speaking. Teachers' traditional focus on grammar—without a critical examination of the social, cultural, and political forces at play in language use—will continue to fall short of the mark. In terms of helping her students think more critically about language, she concludes by admitting that she honestly does not know "how to provide that."

So, how can we help teachers provide answers to youths' critical questions about language? How can we help teachers move away from eradicating their students' language to recognizing, maintaining, and building on the skills that they bring with them to the classroom? In the remainder of this chapter, we outline one example of a critical linguistic approach to language education. This approach addresses the difficult race and class tensions around language by confronting them head on. Rather than checking students' language at the door, we view it as a rich and complex linguistic system, one that should be part of any approach to critical language education.

Studying What Gets "Checked at the Door": A Critical Linguistic Approach to Language Education

Rather than rejecting the language of students' families and communities, a critical linguistic approach connects meaningfully with youth by viewing local cultures and language practices as powerful resources for learning. In the case of this particular high school, the dominant youth culture was heavily influenced by Hip Hop Culture, music, and language, as might be the case in other majority-minority communities around the United States. Of course, if critical approaches are gonna be effective and relevant, they must be continuously adapted to reflect youths' social worlds (Hip Hop or not).

DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION

"Real Talk," in the language of Hip Hop, is an expression that builds on what generations of Black Americans have referred to as "straight talk." This approach borrows the phrase "Real Talk" to create a new way of thinking about language in educational contexts. It utilizes "Real Talk" (naturally occurring conversations) to teach youth explicitly about the

sociolinguistic variation that they manipulate on a regular basis. The project begins with the sociolinguistic analysis of a conversation with one of the local area's best known street Hip Hop artists, JT the Bigga Figga. The class exercise begins by listening to an audiotaped interview, and copies of the tape are then distributed to the students, each of whom has his or her own tape recorder. They are instructed to transcribe the first small portion of the tape *exactly* as they hear it. What they then find out as a class is that they have each produced a unique transcript of the same speech sample. Invariably, some youth will "standardize" the speech samples, and others will "vernacularize" them. As we search for differences between our transcripts, they begin to notice sociolinguistic patterns in the rapper's speech (e.g., "In the first sentence he said, 'He run everything,' and then later he said, 'He runs everything.'"). We take this one feature of the rapper's speech (third-person singular—s variability) and conduct a sociolinguistic analysis of his language, which leads to a larger understanding of the structure and systematicity of spoken language.

LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH REFLEXIVE, ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSES

After learning about the systematicity of spoken speech and that sociolinguistic variation refers to the variable frequencies of certain features within a linguistic system, we introduce the concept of variation in terms of language use, or ways of speaking. The "Language in My Life" project begins by introducing youth to Dell Hymes's theory⁷ of the ethnography of speaking and ends with student-conducted, reflexive, ethnographic analyses of their own speech behavior. The goal is for them to answer the question: How do I use language in my life? They are given an ethnography of speaking reference sheet that outlines basic concepts in this area, such as speech situation, speech event, and speech act, as levels of analysis in a communicative encounter.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

The ethnography of communication is the scientific study of a culture and their communication patterns. Ethnographers of communication seek to understand a culture through a detailed study and description of their language and communication behavior.

- **SPEECH SITUATION**—The largest level of analysis. The social occasion in which speech may occur (for example, lunchtime in the cafeteria; group work in class; birthday party; Hip Hop concert)

- **SPEECH EVENT**—During a speech situation, you will see/hear many speech events (for example, a Hip Hop concert is a speech situation, and a backstage interview with the artist—Jay-Z or Kanye West or Nicki Minaj—is a speech event). The speech event is a smaller layer of analysis that occurs inside the speech situation.
- **SPEECH ACT**—Each action of speech inside of a speech event. This is the smallest layer of analysis (for example, during the backstage interview with Lil Wayne, we might start off by greeting each other—“Wassup, Weezy?”—that greeting is a speech act). In the middle of the interview, he might tell me a joke. That joke is also a speech act (greetings, commands, questions, jokes, etc.).

Students are then presented with another sample of Real Talk—this time with New Orleans rapper Juvenile (in order to use a speaker who is not from their local community)—and are guided through an ethnography of speaking analysis of an interview, which they learn is a speech event. A small sample from the interview is used to create a worksheet:

INTERVIEW WITH JUVENILE

J = Juvenile

A = Alim

A: Wassup, Juve?

J: Wassup, woadie?

A: What's goin on?

J: Chillin, you know me. I'm chillin.

A: How would you describe the last year, year and half for you?

J: Spectacular, man! I've been blessed, you know.

A: It's a blessing, ha?

J: Workin real hard, you know. Just a lot of things. A lot of things have been goin on and so far everything's been goin right. I've been makin the right moves.

They are encouraged to notate the transcript in detail. Youth are usually adept at identifying a certain level of informality (through the use of “slang” like “wassup,” “chillin,” “you know what I'm saying?”) as well as regionalisms in the New Orleans-based rapper's speech (such as “woadie,” which can mean, “man,” “homie,” etc.; “It's all gravy!” for the commonly used “It's all good”), and Alim's use of “ha?” as an attempt to build rapport with (or “be cool with”) the rapper by using one of his most famous expressions.

Table 6.1 Ethnography of Communication

S	Setting/scene	Physical circumstances; your definition of an occasion
P	Participants	Speaker/sender/addressor/hearer/receiver/audience/addressee
E	Ends	Purposes and goals; outcomes
A	Act sequence	Message form and content
K	Key	Tone, manner
I	Instrumentalities	Channel (verbal, nonverbal); forms of speech drawn from communicative repertoire
N	Norms of interaction and interpretation	Specific properties attached to speaking; interpretation of norms within a culture
G	Genre	Textual categories

But, of course, they are told, you can only gather so much information by reading a transcript—you have to “go out into the field.” After introducing the theory and doing a hands-on ethnography of speaking analysis, we wanted them to be able to analyze their own communication behavior in their everyday environments, from their actual lived experiences. After challenging them and asking if they thought that they could do an ethnography of speaking with their own language data, we introduced the “Language in My Life” project. The students were instructed to analyze their own communication behavior as it shifted across contexts and situations. As ethnographers, they were charged with carrying an ethnography notebook and documenting their communicative encounters. The notebook consisted of grids that were to be filled in throughout the day. An example from an eighth grader follows.

Language in My Life

Immediately, this project validates the language practices that youth engage in outside the classroom—for example, rappin or battlin—by allowing them to see their speech behavior taken as a subject of analysis. Further, after collecting data on their own speech, they gain a much higher level of metalinguistic awareness (speaking of themselves as style-shifters possessing multiple languages and a range of speech styles). This allows them to not only better understand the abstract theory of speaking but also to better understand the linguistic landscape of their social worlds. Again, these worlds are not marginalized inside the classroom or

Table 6.2 Language in My Life

Date:	November 22
Time:	Early in the morning, like, 7 am
Mode of Language (reading, speaking, writing, listening, etc.):	Speaking, listening, rappin
Name of Language:	Mostly in slang, or Ebonics, but sometimes in standard English because my aunt was there and she talks like that.
Context (who's involved, where is it happening, what's happening):	I was sitting in the kitchen with my dad, eating cereal before I had to go to school. Before that, I was reading this rap I had wrote over and over again in my room, so I wanted to rap it for my dad. I did, and he was feelin it! He said the he could do a better one, so he tried, but it wasn't better. He called my mom and aunt over from the other room and told me to rap for them and I did. My mom was like, "Wow, Lamar! You bad!" I said, "I know." (Being cocky, as I am!) And my aunt said, "What a talented young man." My dad said he was gonna battle me after school.
Comments on the style(s) of language used:	The language with me and my dad was mostly in slang, or Ebonics, as I like to call it. Nah, I mostly say slang. And my mom, too. But my aunt, she talks standard English. I don't know, maybe because she's older.

left outside the door, but they are seen as valuable cultural and linguistic spaces for learning.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

After the students have learned about and conducted sociolinguistic and ethnographic analyses of their own speech behavior, we encourage them to "go back into the field" and expand their focus. This time, they are to investigate their social worlds through an analysis of their peer group and peer culture. One of the primary ways to accomplish this is through the study of localized lexical usage (or local words, phrases, and slang). We begin by raising youths' awareness of the variety of lexical innovations within Hip Hop Culture (of course, most are already aware of this, since they actively participate in these innovations). To pique their interest as well as to localize the dialogue by focusing on the Bay Area, we provide a specific example of a research interview about the language of Hip Hop Culture with JT the Bigga Figga. In the following short excerpt, JT provides what ethnographers call an emic (insider's) view of Hip Hop's evolving lexicon.

J = JT the Bigga Figga

A = ALIM

A: What does it mean to be certified with game?

J: **Certified** mean you official....How it got incorporated into our language in the streets, from my first experience with the word in the streets, was from **mobb** cars. And the mobb cars is Caprice Classics or Chevy Impalas '87 to '90. Them three years right there. And if you get a mobb car and it don't have a certain seal on it, it's not certified. So when dudes buy the car, it have to have that seal. You want yo car to be certified, you know what I'm saying? And that's just like if you into the collector's cars and if it don't have the same steering wheel or if you change something it's not certified no more. So it's original, you know what I'm saying? And another meaning for certified meaning that you **official**....If I say, "Man, Alim's gon handle it. If he said he gon handle it, he certified, man. He gon handle it." So somebody who word is good.

Upon reading the transcript aloud as a class, students immediately respond by critiquing phrases, calling some out of date, providing new or similar phrases, comparing with other regional phrases, and so on. This excitement is channeled into further training in ethnographic methods. For this particular case, we borrow from the introduction to linguist Geneva Smitherman's *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*.¹⁸ The following worksheet translates academic language into a familiar Hip Hop-stylized way of writing (again, validating multiple forms of language).

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS USED BY GENEVA SMITHERMAN TO WRITE *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. We should use all of these methods in writing our own book (by the way, we need a title—what's up?)

- (1) Written language surveys and word lists completed by Black people. She made up surveys and gave them to some folks that she knew and many that she didn't and asked them to fill out the surveys. What would a survey look like?
- (2) Songs and hit recordings. Basically, she blocked out 30 minutes or so in her daily schedule to play some of her CDs and tapes. As the songs played, she listened really closely for any unique words and phrases. Most of us listen to music way more than 30 minutes a day, right? I know I do.
- (3) Radio shows. My radio stay locked on KMEL, so this one should be easy. Whether you listen to Chuy in the morning or Big Von in the evening for the 7 O'Clock Drop, you'll hear tons of slang words and phrases.

- (4) Movies and television. You can block out 30 minutes to watch your favorite TV show (*106th and Park*, *Rap City*, *BET*, whatever) and catch all the slang that's being used. If you happen to be watching a movie that day or that week, pay extra attention to the slang. You can probably get heka words from one movie.
- (5) Collecting words from community bulletins, leaflets, magazines, announcements, or other written material. Can you think of any that you might use?
- (6) Face-to-face interviews. You can ask people if they know any slang words or phrases that you can include for your slang dictionary. Sometimes we can't think of all of these terms by ourselves, right, so we need some help from our people. How would you ask somebody to help you? Who would you ask?
- (7) Eavesdropping. I ain't gotta tell y'all about that one. Mmm-hmmmm...
- (8) Participant observation. Participant observation means that you are not only observing the event or the scene, but you are also actively participating in it. In what events or scenes do you hear lots of slang talk? I bet you the talk at lunchtime is full of slang words and phrases, huh? This is your first official ethnographic assignment. You are to be a participant observer at lunch tomorrow (Thursday) and at least one other day before we meet again next Wednesday. Keep your lil notebooks handy so you can jot words down as you hear them. I know some of you are dying to ask, so yeah, you can combine this with eavesdropping, but if you get popped in the eye, I'ma be like Silkk the Shokker and say, "OOOOOH, it ain't my fault!"

The students are given further training in these methods as we move through the unit. They are charged with the immense responsibility of archiving Black Culture—in this case, Hip Hop Culture—through words. Going above and beyond what is often expected of them, they contribute to a body of scholarly literature on their own speech variety (an object of study that has historically been dominated by White researchers).¹⁹

MOVING FROM INDIVIDUAL TO STRUCTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF LINGUISTIC RACISM

Our goal is to develop an approach that does more than provide students with the tools to analyze language and to theorize its use in their local, social worlds. Beyond this, a critical approach helps youth think about complex issues of language and power. Many of our youth, particularly those who speak marginalized language varieties, are already acutely aware of the fact that people can use language to discriminate against "Others"; they and their families are often those "Others." To begin with, students

(and teachers) can learn directly about the relationship between language and discrimination in American society. A critical approach should begin with teaching about the diverse range of language varieties spoken in the United States so as to combat linguistic prejudices as well as internalized feelings of linguistic shame. For example, linguists have helped produce documentary films that can serve as excellent resources for youth who are developing ideas about the concept of linguistic discrimination. Students can share their opinions about the diverse issues and perspectives raised in the film. For instance, one class was given this handout during a viewing of the film *American Tongues* (1986), an effort by sociolinguists to communicate the fundamental principles of language to a wider audience:

AMERICAN TONGUES

Learning all about American English language varieties

Opening Exercise:

Define these unique words from around the country:

Cabinet, Gumband, Pau hana, Jambalaya, Antigoggin, Snicklefritz,
Schlep

Opening Questions:

What did you get out of this video?

What was the most interesting thing you learned?

What was the funniest part of the movie?

How would you relate this video to your life and the way that you talk?

Discuss these quotes from the movie with a partner. What's your opinion about the issues that these people bring up?

"It's easy to figure out which dialects are more desirable and which dialects are less desirable—just look at which groups are more desirable and which groups are less desirable. We tend to think of urban as better than rural. We tend to think of middle class as better than working class. We tend to think of White as better than Black. So if you're a member of one of those stigmatized groups, then the way you talk will also be stigmatized. This goes on *all* over the United States—in every community."

"[The way we talk] it's ignorant. It *sounds* ignorant. Oh, come on, these people hear this stuff they're gonna say, 'What the heck is that garbage coming out of their mouth?!' That's gonna happen. And they're gonna say, 'Look at them two beautiful girls. If they'd shut their mouths they'd be great.'"

"I think that the majority of White America, you know, does not accept Black English. But not because of the language itself, because of the people who speak it, which is racism."

"Even though Black English is mocked and looked down upon by many White people, a lot of Black Americans use it to relate to one another every day. And those who don't use it in their home communities run the risk of becoming outsiders."

"I have two sons, one's 12 and one's 15. And when I hear them talk, I say, 'God, am I raising two White boys here?' And I don't mean that to be negative in respect to White males, but I don't want my boys sounding like White males!"

"Black or White, Texas or New York, few people talk the same way all the time. There's one way of talking with friends and family, and another way for business or school. We switch back and forth because we know there's no one way that works in every situation."

"There's a feeling that anybody who talks like that can't be very smart. And if I don't talk like that I must be smarter than you, and I don't want anybody who's not very smart representing my company. And those kinds of folks tend to have a hard time getting a job. So their speech is very, very important."

Once students have shared their opinions and stories, the goal should be to focus on how these examples of *individual prejudice* (which students can easily point out) lead to *structural discrimination* (which is a little more difficult but embedded in the responses that relate to "representing a company" or "getting a job," etc.). While most American sociolinguists and teacher educators do a good job showing America's linguistic diversity, they often fail to show how this diversity is linked to America's social inequalities. In other words, most of our suggestions about pedagogy on language attitudes and awareness tend to discuss linguistic stigmatization in terms of individual prejudices rather than as discrimination that is part and parcel of the socio-structural fabric of society. This limited understanding is suspect because it serves the needs of those who currently benefit the most from language discrimination while ignoring the needs of those who suffer from it.

To serve the needs of our youth, we need to incorporate the full range of what linguists know about the relationship between language, power, and discrimination. A great way to do this is to introduce the sociolinguistic research that addresses *linguistic profiling*, which has been described by linguist John Baugh as the auditory equivalent of racial profiling.²⁰ This type of profiling, usually occurring over the phone, can prevent potential home

owners from moving into certain neighborhoods, for example. Students are introduced to this compelling research by watching a video of ABC cable news coverage of the Linguistic Profiling Project. The research findings, which show that the majority of Americans can make correct racial inferences based on the pronunciation of the single word *hello*, inspire a whole unit of activities designed to investigate this phenomenon. Youth are also encouraged to collect data about linguistic profiling in their communities. The following worksheet accompanies the video and includes various short assignments:

LINGUISTIC PROFILING WORKSHEET

What is *linguistic profiling*? What is the relationship between linguistic profiling and racial profiling? Do you think you can tell whether somebody "sounds White" or "sounds Mexican" or "sounds Black" or "sounds Indian" or "sounds Arab" or any other race or ethnic group? Today we are going to talk about the relationship between race, language, profiling, and discrimination. We are about to watch a news story that ran on ABC News with Peter Jennings. This news segment is a case of what we call, "Applied Linguistics"—i.e. an area of research where linguists apply their scientific knowledge about language to real-life situations that affect everyday people—like you and me.

FREEWRITE First impressions. What do you think?

OUTLINE OF NEWS STORY

- 8:52—Language as a criterion for discrimination. Linguistic profiling → racial profiling.
9:32—James Johnson's housing application, his experience and his experiment. Fair housing agency experiment.
10:32—John Baugh, Stanford University professor—one simple word, "Hello." Linguistics and the law.
11:24—Linguistic Profiling experiment at Stanford in Alim's Hip Hop class. Percentages of correct answers. Is this reality?

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

[Open space for students' summary of the research presented in the news story]

ASSIGNMENT

Let's design a series of interview questions. In the coming week, interview 3 or 4 people (or more, if you choose)—they can be

family or friends—about linguistic profiling and record or take notes about their responses. Compile your responses and submit for next week.

It is at this point in the developmental progression of the unit that youth begin to explore the relationships between language and structural discrimination. They also begin to see how the struggles of their particular groups relate to the struggles of other groups. For example, while one Black American student interviewed his aunt and discovered that she had a very painful experience of discrimination in the housing market (she would often be told that units were “still open” only to be turned away upon arrival), a Latina student shared a narrative from her father in which he was fired from his truck-driving job because of “phony” charges of tardiness. In the first case, the Black American aunt spoke “proper” on the phone, but she was still often denied access to housing based on the visual representation of her race (“when they saw I was a Black person”). And in the second case, the Latino father spoke English as a second language and believed that he was fired not because of his job performance (or his race) but his “problem with English,” as he put it.

These narratives offer opportunities for our youth to explore and critically interrogate the links between language, discrimination, and power. Further, after being made aware of how linguistic profiling affects their communities, they are motivated to engage in community activism around issues of linguistic discrimination. Youth are not only thinking critically about language, but they are also putting their knowledge to work for their communities by developing consciousness-raising campaigns. These campaigns help provide resources for community members to engage in the transformation of their neighborhoods. From a critical perspective, dissatisfaction and awareness aren't enough; action is needed to bring about social change.

At this point, it should be obvious that critical approaches take students well beyond the elementary skills required for the memorization and production of certain grammatical rules in the traditional language classroom. These traditional approaches expect very little from Black youth. Teachers continue to read Black students' resistance to White linguistic norming as a sign of their inability to grasp “standard English.” As our well-meaning teacher reflected:

I mean, thinking about it, it's just, it's asking a lot of them to do, not only to speak standard English but to know all these other like smaller nuances that they've never experienced before and never had to think about. Like, it's probably on some level pretty overwhelming to them to have to deal with all of these things at once.

While the blame game is not a useful strategy, teachers often use these infantilizing discourses to shift blame from themselves onto their students. But as we've seen, Black youth manipulate language in a number of inventive ways, engage in creative exploitation of linguistic differences, and participate in complex verbal games that require high-level improvisational skills. A critical approach expects much more from students, going beyond traditional grammar lessons to teach students how to analyze and manipulate language in their social worlds (why reserve this knowledge for privileged university students?). Finally, it teaches students that we must do more than study the relationships between language, racism, and power—we must do what we can to alter them.

“That's Just the Way the World Works”: Exposing the Covert Racism of Cultural Scripts

Undoubtedly, some readers of this chapter are still stuck on the “standard English” question. Others are still trying to make sense of the conversations with the well-meaning teacher and the well-meaning journalist (the one who asked about Obama's speech). While these folks are obviously not dressed in white hoods, foaming at the mouth, and shouting out racial slurs (a limited depiction of racists, to be sure), a critical examination of their beliefs gets at the subtle workings of racism through language. At the same time, we can't stop there. To be honest, we must turn this critical examination inward on sociolinguistics and teacher education to figure out how we may be complicit in this type of covert racism.

To focus on the teacher, how did she arrive at the belief that her students absolutely needed to learn “standard English” in order to succeed in society? First, while teachers are some of the most hardworking members of society and often seem to have supernatural stores of energy, they do not have superhuman abilities. Teachers, like the rest of us, are not immune to the stereotypical language beliefs that are at the core of what Americans “know” about language (rather than poking fun at the teacher, we need to look at ourselves in the mirror to see our own language prejudices—Real Talk). Still, it is imperative to ask how she might have arrived at the following conclusion:

I know you might speak this way at home, but in an academic setting, or if you're interviewing for a job, or if you're applying to college, and you talk to someone like that, they will like not even give you the time of day... that's just the way that it is! You have to learn how to play the game guys! I'm sorry.

Let's begin by taking a closer look at the teacher's training. This teacher was enrolled in a teacher education program at the elite, private university located within a few miles of her high school. In one three-week course, she learned about Black Language, linguistic diversity, language attitudes, and teaching strategies for linguistically and culturally diverse students. The course clearly didn't have a lasting impact in this particular case. In fact, we believe that the course may have been at least partly responsible for perpetuating the discriminatory language attitudes that it was meant to counter. In the course, the instructor uncritically used the documentary film *American Tongues* (recall the worksheet included in this chapter) as a central text.²¹ The film, although somewhat outdated, is ideal for exposing teachers to linguistic diversity in the United States. It not only introduces viewers to the concept of language variation, but it also provides several examples of linguistic, racial, and regional discrimination. After discussing Black Language at length, the film cuts to an interview with one of the foremost sociolinguists in the field, who concludes, somewhat apologetically:

Let's face it. There are certain consequences for not speaking a standard dialect. For example...you may have certain limitations in terms of the job market. If you don't wanna deal with the negatives, it may be very helpful to learn a standard dialect for certain situations. It may not be fair, but that's the way it is. (Walt Wolfram, principal advisor to the film)

While this film was intended to communicate some of sociolinguistics's fundamental principles to a wider audience, it also communicated some of the field's fundamental biases (check out how this well-meaning sociolinguist's comments map almost word-for-word onto the well-meaning teacher's comments). It is clear from this example that the American sociolinguistic establishment, by and large, has been complicit in speaking from a position of privilege. This position incorrectly depicts speaking a "standard dialect" as a simple question of individual choice. But as we know, White America doesn't just ask Black people to learn a few grammatical rules. Rather it demands that they act, talk, and sound like Whites if they are to enter the "mainstream." Sociolinguists, like teachers, it turns out, are clearly not immune to discriminatory language attitudes nor do we always recognize our own subtle forms of racism.²²

Rather than insisting on the need for working-class Blacks (and other groups pushed to the margins of American society) to speak "standard English," we need to expose widely repeated American cultural scripts for the myths that they are. We also need to call out approaches that merely

pay lip service to the "systematic" and "highly verbal" linguistic practices of Blacks, while turning around and telling Black people to they face that Black ways of speaking ain't good enough for any important or intellectual business. The scripts that claim that "certain languages are appropriate for certain contexts" or "of course, all languages are equal, but we need to teach Black students the 'discourses of power'" don't change a damn thing. Actually they do a terrific job of maintaining the status quo. These approaches keep the position of the dominant culture intact, not because Blacks believe in its superiority, but because Blacks—and Whites—tactily accept the notion that the White middle class either cannot or will not accept Black Language.

How many countless White folks have you heard say, "Well, fair or unfair, that's just the way the world works"? Black folks got their version of this too: "It's their world and we're just in it—so as long as they're in charge, we gotta play by their rules." Rather than viewing these statements as an end point, we take them as the starting point for the critical discussion that we need to be having. Instead of agreeing for one reason or another that we "absolutely have" to provide "these students" with "standard English," we might ask: How are we all involved in perpetuating the myth of a "standard" and that it is somehow better, more intelligent, more appropriate, more important, and so on than other varieties? Why do we elevate one particular variety over all others, even when all of our linguistic knowledge tells us that "all languages are equal in linguistic terms"? Why does the "standard" continue to be imposed despite the fact that what we have for a "standard English" in the United States is nothing short of the imposition of White, middle-class language norms? How and why do we continue to measure the worth of People of Color largely by their level of assimilation into dominant White culture? (See Barack Obama's quote at the opening of this chapter.) These questions are especially important since this hegemonic move is used to grant opportunities to Whites while denying opportunities to as many others as possible (including poor, marginal Whites).

Challenging Hegemony: Moving from "Playing the Game" to "Changing the Game"

Asking different kinds of questions and developing different kinds of approaches, we can stop apologizing for "the way things are" and begin helping our students imagine the way things can be. By asking different kinds of questions, we can begin to think differently—that is critically—about the relationships between language, racism, education, and power in society. By asking different kinds of questions, we can stop silently legitimizing "standard English" and tactily standardizing "Whiteness."²³ In

leaving out critical issues of race and class, students inevitably begin to view their culture and language as unfit for school or any other context linked to status and prestige. If we continue to uncritically present "standard English" as somehow better than other varieties of English, we are implicitly devaluing these varieties and the people who speak them. As a result, many students not only come to see their *language* as having a lesser role in places like schools, but more dangerously, they start to see *themselves* in that light too.²⁴ This logical conclusion would be, in Morrison's words, the "really cruel fallout of racism."

Rather than falling back on uncritical conformist and assimilationist models of schooling, perhaps we can learn from other models of language education from multilingual democracies around the world. What might the research in Sweden, Norway, and other countries which shows that "recognizing the legitimacy of other varieties of a language" improves "standard" language learning have to offer us here in the United States? What about South Africa's policy of 11 official languages, enshrined in its Constitution, which elevates its African languages to the status of English and Afrikaans? What can Americans learn from Perù's innovative new multilingual law that calls for the preservation and use of its indigenous languages? In this so-called developing democracy, bilingual, intercultural education is now the law of the land: All children who speak an indigenous language as their first language have the right to be educated in Spanish and in their first language at all levels of the education system. There are other more egalitarian, democratic models out there.²⁵ Withholding opportunities from all folks who don't talk like you ain't "the way the world works"—it's the way hegemony works.

Our students and teachers need to be made aware of the different ways that the game's being played. Rather than creating cultural and linguistic clones, schooling should be about the serious business of educating young minds to deal with (and, when necessary, on) a society of power politics and incredible complexity. Schooling should not be about convincing students to play the game but, rather, about helping them understand how the game's been rigged and, more importantly, how they can work to change it. Real Talk.

NOTES

1. See Barack Obama's *Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006, 235).
2. Check out the full interview with Toni Morrison (by Thomas LeClaire) in *The New Republic*, March 21, 1981, pages 25-29. Shoutout to John R. Rickford and Russell J. Rickford for bringing this to our attention in your book, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

3. As one middle-class Black father famously put it in the 1986 documentary film *American Tongues*, "And I don't mean that to be negative in respect to White males, but I don't want my boys sounding like White males!" For him and others, it's important that their children keep their cultural and linguistic heritage intact even as they master other ways of speaking and being in the world.

4. Linguist Rosina Lippi-Green makes this point forcefully in her book, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1997). This now classic work has just been updated and republished in 2012.

5. As linguist and anthropologist Arthur Spears wrote in the introduction to *Race and Ideology: Language, Symbolism, and Popular Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999, 12-13): "The more recent neoracism is subtler, in most cases claiming a cultural basis for what is seen as low achievement by people of color... Neoracism is still racism, in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression. Its new ideological focus on culture has the same function, and provides a vast new field to mine for supposed causes of lower achievement of groups of color based on dysfunctional attitudes, values, and orientations." In our case, folks claim that their attacks on Black Culture through its language are not racist because they don't hate "all Black people." So, what, you only hate the ones that don't conform to your norms? You're neo, baby. Check yourself.

6. We wasn't playin' (that's generalization of *was* to plural subjects) when we said that Black Language *was* the most studied variety by sociolinguists. These linguistic features and more can be found in William Labov's "Contraction, Deletion, and Inherent Variability of the English Copula," *Language* 45(1969): 715-762; William Labov's *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972; Ralph Fasold's *Tense Marking in Black English: A Linguistic and Social Analysis*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1972; H. Samy Alim's *You Know My Steez: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Stylishing in a Black American Speech Community*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004; John Baugh's *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure, and Survival*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983; Peter Sells, John Rickford, and Thomas Wasow's "Negative Inversion in African American Vernacular English," *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 14(3): 591-627; and for two excellent books that bring a lot of these sources together with comprehensive overview and analysis: Lisa Green's *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and John R. Rickford's *African American Vernacular English: Features and Use, Evolution, and Educational Implications* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999).

As mentioned, the last several examples of BL come from Barack Obama. He not only uses BL when speaking (as we outlined in detail in chapter 1), but his writings offer plenty of examples. The example of *multiple negation* ("You can't help folks that ain't gonna make it nohow") is from *Dreams from My Father*, page 136. The example of *negative inversion* ("Ain't nothing gonna change") is from page 248. And the generalization of *was* to use with plural and second person subjects ("Tell me we wouldn't be treated different if we was white") comes from page 74. While Obama usually presents his own speech without any distinctive features of BL, he uses the features generously while reporting other people's speech (these three features, and especially copula absence, seem to be his favorites).

7. A must read on this is Marcyliena Morgan's "The African American Speech Community: Reality and Sociolinguistics" in her edited book *Language and the Social Construction of Identity in Creole Situations*, (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1994, 121-148).

8. Black lexicon (words and phrases) goes way back, both in terms of scholarship and in terms of its African roots. Definitely check out Lorenzo Dow Turner's 1949 game-changing classic, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Clarence Major's two collections of African American slang, the first from 1970 and his more recent update, *From Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American*

Slang (New York & London: Penguin, 1994); Joey L. Dillard's *Lexicon of Black English* (New York: Seabury, 1977); Edith Foib's *Runnin' Down Some Lines: The Language and Culture of Black Teenagers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Joseph Holloway and W. Vass's *The African Heritage of American English* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987); and Geneva Smitherman's more contemporary perspective in *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994 [2000]).

Check out the work that's been done on *signifyin* since the 1960s. It came out of folklore, intercultural communication, linguistic anthropology, and related fields: Roger Abraham's *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Chicago: Aldine, 1964)—you gotta wonder what Schoolly D, Beanie Sigel, and Freeway would say about this now, almost 50 years later! And this one, Thomas Kochman's "Rapping" in the Black Ghetto," *Trans-Action*, February, 1969, pages 26–34; and this one by a sista scholar, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan's *Language Behavior in a Black Urban Community* (Berkeley: University of California, Language Behavior Research Laboratory, 1971); William Labov's *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972); Geneva Smitherman's "The Power of the Rap: The Black Idiom and the New Black Poetry" in *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* (1973, 259–274) and *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977; reissued, with revisions, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986); another sista scholar, Marcyliena Morgan's "Conversational Signifying: Grammar and Indirectness among African American Women" in Elmor Ochs, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Sandra Thompson's (eds.) *Grammar and Interaction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

For two classic works on *playin the dozers*, a must-read is H. Rap Brown's "Street Talk" in Thomas Kochman's edited volume *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972, 205–207); also, Roger Abraham's "Rapping and Capping: Black Talk as Art" in John Swzed's edited volume *Black America* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

For classic *call and response* work, check out Jack Daniel and Geneva Smitherman's "How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community" in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62, February 1976; Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Houghton Mifflin; reissued, with revisions, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977[1986]); For an updated Hip Hop version of call and response, check out Imani Perry's *Prophets of the Hood: The Politics and Poetics of Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and H. Samy Alim's *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

In addition to Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin*, check out Cheryl Keyes's classic article, "Verbal Art Performance in Rap Music: The Conversation of the 80s" in *Folklore Forum* 17(2), Fall 1984, pages 143–152.

These Hip Hop practices extend the Black Oral Tradition and have gone global so kids thousands of miles apart are adopting and adapting them in their local social worlds. Check out Dawn Norfleet's *Hip-Hop Culture in New York City: The Role of Verbal Music Performance in Defining a Community* (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1997); Michael Newman's "Not dogmatically / It's all about me: Ideological Conflict in a High School Rap Crew" in *Taboo: A Journal of Culture and Education*, 2001; H. Samy Alim's *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim and Alastair Pennycook's edited volume, *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (New York/London: Routledge, 2009).

See Arthur Spears's "African-American Language Use: Ideology and So-Called Obscenity" in Salikoko Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey, and John Baugh (eds.) *African American English: Structure, History, and Usage* (New York: Routledge, 1998, 226–250) and Marcyliena Morgan's "More Than a Mood or an Attitude: Discourse and Verbal Genres in African-American Culture" in the same book, pages 251–281.

9. The word *Ebonics* was thrust back into the spotlight in 2010 when the Drug Enforcement Administration posted a job announcement for linguists fluent in "Ebonics." Check out this article by H. Samy Alim and Imani Perry at: <http://www.thegrio.com/opinion/why-the-deas-embrace-of-ebonics-is-lost-in-translation.php>. The term *Ebonics* was coined by psychologist Robert Williams during a private meeting of Black linguists, educators and other scholars attending a 1973 conference on language and the urban child. Williams details the circumstances of this meeting and his and these other Black scholars' rationale for preferring the term *Ebonics* in his 1975 edited publication of the conference papers, *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* (St. Louis: Institute of Black Studies). The term made its national debut in 1997 when the Oakland School Board passed a resolution that teachers take the language of their students (those for whom Black Language was their primary language) into account when teaching "standard English." While the rest of the world went apeshit—to be blunt about it—linguists were like, "Here we go again." The Linguistic Society of America tried to quell the madness with their own resolution, which stated: "The systematic and expressive nature of the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the African American vernacular has been established by numerous scientific studies over the past thirty years. Characterizations of Ebonics as 'slang,' 'mutant,' 'lazy,' 'defective,' 'ungrammatical,' or 'broken English' are incorrect and demeaning.... There is evidence from Sweden, the U.S., and other countries that speakers of other varieties can be aided in their learning of the standard variety by pedagogical approaches which recognize the legitimacy of the other varieties of a language. From this perspective, the Oakland School Board's decision to recognize the vernacular of African American students in teaching them Standard English is *linguistically and pedagogically sound*." [our emphasis]. For an excellent breakdown of Oakland's and the Linguistic Society of America's resolutions, read John Baugh's *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). And for the best, comprehensive discussion of what Oakland was *actually* trying to do—from scholars and the teachers and school board members themselves—a must-read is Theresa Perry and Lisa Delpit's *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

Linguists were used to the racist vitriol that accompanies any effort on the part of educators to recognize Black Language as a legitimate variety. Two decades earlier in Ann Arbor, Michigan, what became known as the "Black English case" (*Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*) was the talk of the nation. Geneva Smitherman served as chief consultant and expert witness for more than two years of litigation on behalf of 15 Black, economically deprived children residing in a low-income housing project. Instead of incorrectly placing children in learning disability and speech pathology classes, Smitherman and others argued that teachers should take the language variety of their students into account and use it to help students acquire "the standard." Though "Black English" was not found to be a barrier to students' learning per se, the uninformed and racist institutional response to it was. The full story is too long for an endnote. For a full breakdown of the case with expert linguists, lawyers, and literary figures, definitely check out Geneva Smitherman's edited volume *Black English and the Education of Black Children and Youth: Proceedings of the National Invitational Symposium on the King Decision* (Detroit: Wayne State University, Center for Black Studies, 1981) and also her "What Go Round Come Round: King in Perspective," *Harvard Educational Review*, February 1981, pages 40–56).

One reason we wrote this current book is to help prevent the next 20-year firestorm and to be about the serious business of educating Black and other linguistically marginalized youth.

10. Freudian slip? Nah, surely she meant facial expressions.

11. Notice how Black ways of speaking are subtly framed as something to "get away with." Note also the troubling view of Black patenting that creeps into many of these conversations.

- The fact that her students' ways of speaking are linked to a different culture of communication altogether (one that values certain ways of speaking that may be at odds with White, upper-middle-class ways of speaking) is never considered.
12. Of course, White America's mapping of negative characteristics onto the language of socially marginalized groups is not unique. Studies have shown that dominant cultures around the world do the same thing, putting other people's language down in order to lift theirs up. This attribution of negative characteristics due to cultural differences has been noted frequently in studies of intercultural communication. For pioneering work on this, see John Gumperz's *Discourse Strategies* and his *Language and Social Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982, for both books).
 13. We don't mean to have fun at the teacher's expense. Valley Girl Talk has actually been studied by sociolinguists. If you're not familiar with this kind of talk, you should check out Robert MacNeil and William Cran's *Do You Speak American? A Companion to the PBS Television Series* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2005). In the case of this particular teacher, I mean, like, how many times can you, like, say the word *like* in like the same sentence, right? In all seriousness, though, the American public has made teachers out to be monsters in recent years. Our goal here is not to contribute to that but to see ourselves in that teacher—hope you're looking in the mirror as you read this.
 14. For the technical linguistic and ethnographic details, check H. Samy Alim's *You Know My Steez: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Styleshifting in a Black American Speech Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
 15. Nobody really puts this better than John Wideman: "There is no single register [style] of African American speech. And it's not words and intonations, it's a whole attitude about speech that has historical rooting. It's not a phenomenon that you can isolate and reduce to linguistic characteristics. It has to do with the way a culture conceives of the people inside of that culture. It has to do with a whole complicated protocol of silences and speech, and how you use speech in ways other than directly to communicate information. And it has to do with, certainly, the experiences that the people in the speech situation bring into the encounter. What's fascinating to me about African American speech is its spontaneity, the requirement that you not only have a repertoire of vocabulary or syntactic devices/constructions, but you come prepared to do something in an attempt to meet the person on a level that both uses the language, mocks the language, and recreates the language." That's from his piece, "Frame and Dialect: The Evolution of the Black Voice in American Literature" in *American Poetry Review* 5.5 (Sept.-Oct. 1976), pages 34–37.
 16. See especially the work of Carol D. Lee, Shirley Brice Heath, Keith Gilyard, Elaine Richardson, Ernest Morrell, and Maisha T. Winn. They have produced some of the most critical work. Most recently, check Gilyard's *True to the Language Game: African American Discourse, Cultural Politics, and Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2011), which contains a chapter that examines the political discourse surrounding the rise of Barack Obama. A valuable resource for those teaching students in high school and first-year college courses is Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva's *Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003). The work offers a historical perspective on the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" policy of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and advocates language and literacy teaching practices that promote linguistic diversity. The collection was motivated by the dismal results of a national survey of teacher language attitudes conducted by the CCCC Language Policy Committee, chaired by Smitherman.
 17. Dell Hymes was one of the most influential linguists and anthropologists of the twentieth century. Check this source for his early theoretical work on ethnographic approaches to language and culture: *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974). The handouts borrow generously from his work.
18. Geneva Smitherman's *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin) was released in 1994 and 2000. The new handout borrows heavily from her work and down-to-earth explanation of complicated methods.
 19. In terms of lexicon and its relation to local cultures, for example, the students documented the use of the term *rogue*. The term is a localized example of *semantic inversion*: that highlights a very specific regionality, as it is used only within their 2.5-square mile city. Folks use it to describe those who possess a nonconformist, street ethic but it's also used more broadly to refer to friends and associates (like the terms *homie*, *potna*, etc.). Semantic inversion involves flipping a bad meaning into a good one. So, rather than follow conventional meanings of *rogue* (for example, in the way that US foreign policy under George W. Bush defined states that did not conform to the will of the United States as rogue states), they create new ones, used for those who don't bow down to the demands of unjust authorities, those who make a way, outta no way when the cards are stacked against em.
 20. See John Baugh's piece, "Linguistic Profiling," in Sinfree Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arneetha F. Ball, and Arthur K. Spears (eds.) *Black Linguistics: Language, Politics and Society in Africa and the Americas* (London: Routledge, 2003, 155–168).
 21. *American Tongues* was produced and directed by Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker (New York: Center for New American Media, 1986). The film is one of the best documentaries ever produced about language in the United States and remains one of the best teaching tools in the game. While its attempts to address linguistic prejudice are laudatory, a more critical approach is needed in order to serve the needs of marginalized communities.
 22. Walt Wolfram has been on the cutting edge of research on marginalized language varieties for the better part of five decades. It should be noted that his well-meaning comments here were not at all controversial to the majority of sociolinguists when *American Tongues* was produced; with some notable exceptions, such as Geneva Smitherman, James Sledd, and a few others, his comments were par for the sociolinguistics course.
 23. Norman Fairclough, a leader in the critical language approach, refers to traditional approaches as merely "dressing up inequality as diversity." Check out the intro to his classic edited volume in this arena, simply titled *Critical Language Awareness* (London & New York: Longman, 1992). Also check out the chapter by Hillary Janks and R. Ivanic, "Critical Language Awareness and Emancipatory Discourse" in the same book. These works have been useful in the formulation of our approach here in the United States. Also, Alastair Pennycook's work has been invaluable—begin with his already classic text, *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001).
 24. David Corson's overview of the critical approach out of Britain is extremely useful in this sense. Check it out: *Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for Teachers and Administrators* (Mahwah, NJ/London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999).
 25. Shoutout to Ana Celia Zentella, Laura Graham, and other members of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology's Task Force/Committee on Language and Social Justice for bangin on these issues. Shoutout to John R. Rickford and the Linguistic Society of America on Sweden and Norway. Thanks to Luis O. Reyes for bringing the news of Peru's new multilingual law. Also, if you wanna see what other models look like, check out Nancy Hornberger's edited volume, *Continua of Bilinguality: An Ecological Framework for Educational Policy, Research, and Practice in Multilingual Settings* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003). It's got leading scholars from around the world offering multilingual, democratic approaches to language and education.