

Y'all show some respeck now! America gives up on teaching 'standard English' in favour of 'Black language' instead

by Michael Rectenwald

Future	will { I we they he she be?	{ you we they he she Will be...	will not be
Present	am I are you we they ...? is he she	I am ... you we they are... he she is ...	am not are not is not

After scholars decried English as 'anti-black linguistic racism,' the nation's leading academic language association acceded to the demand that black students no longer have to think about proper English, let alone use it.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) has released an official statement demanding that *"teachers stop using academic language and standard English"* and teach the *"Black language"* in college classrooms.

In the [statement](#), titled, *"This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!"*, a group of US English professors issued a long series of overlapping and

somewhat redundant demands regarding language use and teaching in higher education, including the rejection of “*standard English*,” and that “*teachers, researchers, and scholars put some respeck on Black Language.*”

The announcement, the drafters note, comes on the heels of the Black Lives Matter protests and riots, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, which they say disproportionately afflicts black people. Listing over 25 previous statements and resolutions already issued by the CCCC on diverse language practices, the writers claim that these do not go far enough in promoting “*Black linguistic Consciousness to decolonize the mind (and/or) language, unlearn white supremacy, and unravel anti-Black linguistic racism!*”

Lest one think that the statement is merely a “demand” made by a handful of “*Black language scholars*,” the [CCCC](#) officially [adopted](#) the resolution on August 3. This means that the most important association for the teaching of English in higher education in the United States has acceded to the demand that black students no longer should even have to think about “*standard English*,” let alone use it.

Despite a few stereotypical sops apparently thrown out to “*Black language*” use (“*ain’t*” and “*put some respeck on*”), the statement itself is written in academic language, and is marked by the overuse of jargon and an obscurantism for which academic discourse has become infamous.

Further, while the demand “*requires that all students get an opportunity to learn about Black Language from Black language scholars or experts*,” it apparently limits the use of “*Black language*” to black people alone, forbidding as it does the “*cultural appropriation*” of the “*Black language*” by others. That would apparently make the “*Black language*” the first language in history that you’re not allowed to learn to use, and which its current speakers are not eager that you

speak, unless you are of the right skin colour.

One wonders what sets these scholars apart, such that they have been able to learn and adopt "*academic language*," while their students apparently cannot, and should not be challenged to do so. Are they not thereby condemning their students to a mono-linguistic, cultural prison of sorts? Why should these students be barred from understanding the works of "*white*" authors like John Milton, and be confined to those of only black writers like Tupac Shakur? What does this say about the professors' estimations of the abilities of their own black students?

In fact, the proposition that black linguistics be taught and encouraged to the exclusion of standard English, or other more elaborate English language use, amounts to a form of cultural and linguistic essentialism – the assumption that all black people talk the same way, that "*white*" language is inaccessible to them, and that therefore whole bodies of writing should remain forever beyond their comprehension and appreciation.

This is nothing less than intentional segregation and impoverishment, the kind of cultural containment the likes of which the Harlem Renaissance writer Ralph Ellison – when arguing with the critic Irving Howe, who suggested that black writers like him must write "*protest fiction*" – decried as more confining than the Jim Crow South.

First published in