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TOO TIRED TO CODESWITCH: ANALYZING THE PROPHETIC RHETORIC OF  
CRITICAL BLACK LANGUAGE AWARENESS

by

Lionnell Smith

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Communication Studies

The University of Memphis

August 2023

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, Lee Elbert and Barbara Ann Smith, who loved me and taught me through Black Language. I also dedicate this work to Black Language speakers throughout the African Diaspora for whom Black ways of speaking have been liberating despite linguistic oppression. Finally, I dedicate this research project to prophetic teachers everywhere. May you never stop bearing witness.

## **Dangme Translation (of Ghana, West Africa)**

Mliṅo niṅmaa nitsumo nɛɛ miha mifɔlɔi ni b jeṅ doṅṅ, Lee Elbert ke Barbara Ann Smith ye suomɔ ni amɛjiekpo atsɔɔ mi kɛtsɔsemɔ ni amɛtsɔse mi kɛtsɔ Mei Dijii awiemɔ mli, Mlisaa miṅo nɛkɛ nitsumo nɛɛ mliha naawielɔi kɛha mɛi dijii awiemɔ kɛtsɔ Africa kpokpai fɛɛ ni eha wiemɔ le eye ehe tse naagbai baa ye mlai kɛha wiemɔi, Naagbee le mliṅo nitsumo le mliha gbalɔi atsɔɔlɔi ye hefɛehe, Nyɛ ka kpaa odase yeli

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## **Yoruba Translation (of Nigeria, West Africa)**

Mo fi isẹ iwádíí yíi júbà àwọn òbí mi olóògbé Lee Elbert àti Barbara Ann Smith, àwọn ti wón nifẹ́ mi tí wón sì kọ mi ní èdè àwọn aláwò dúdú. Mo tún fi isẹ yíi júbà àwọn tí ó n sọ àwọn aláwò dúdú tí wón wà ní ilẹ̀ òkèèrè ní Áfíríkà, àwọn ẹnítí a ti kọ ni síso èdè àwọn aláwò dúdú láífi ti ìnira isọwọlo èdè pè. Lákòtán, mo fi isẹ iwádíí yíi júbà àwọn olùkọ níbi gbogbo tí wón n wo ojọ iwájú. Ẹ ò ní ní ìdálówókọ nínú isẹ yíi tí ẹ yàn láàyò.

Translation provided by:  
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Finally, I want to thank the home team—my family. In particular, I am grateful to my sister Shaquita (aka Kita) who has never ceased to check on me and offer words of affirmation during this doctoral journey. When our mother passed away in 2014, you became a rock I didn’t know I needed. When I receive good or bad news, you’re the first person I call. I love you and am so grateful for you. Thanks to my older brothers who always look out for me. You make sure I have everything I need. Thanks for suggesting miniseries to watch when I needed to step away from academic life and thank you for listening to me complain when things got tough. And to my brother, Tacorey – thank you for always going out of your way to support me. You’d jump on a plane or drive almost any distance to be with me if you suspected I needed you. You’re a devoted friend. Thanks for supportive texts saying, “Write on, Badu!” I needed it, and I thank you.

There are so many people I want to thank, and I will. But for now, just know that I am sincerely grateful for your love, support, and kindness which have helped me navigate this journey. In the spirit of the African concept Ubuntu, I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.

Thank you.

Medaase Paa.

Ese oo.

‘Preciate cha!

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the rhetorical discourses of three critical Black Language teacher-scholar-activists through the lens of Black or African American prophetic rhetoric. This transdisciplinary project aims to expand the conversation regarding the role of rhetorical communication in the activity of instruction. This research brings teaching and instruction to the forefront as a rhetorical situation in which the cultural politics of Black languages and literacies are prophetically addressed.

Based on close reading of selected texts, this dissertation offers the development of three rhetorical frameworks: (a) womanist prophetic rhetoric, (b) Black prophetic fugitivity, and (c) prophetic rehabilitation. Each framework indexes a specific prophetic persona that corresponds to respective rhetors' pedagogic performance. These include: (a) the womanist prophet, (b) the fugitive prophet, and (c) the rehabilitating prophet. These frameworks and personae shed light on what it means to be a prophetic teacher in this world.

In analyzing selected texts through a Black or African American prophetic lens, this research lays the bricks for a path toward prophetic approaches and understandings to teaching and instruction in myriad subject areas. The concluding chapter expands on the development of Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy—a liberatory pedagogic approach rooted within the Black prophetic-rhetorical tradition which combines critical analysis with rhetorical performance. Consistent with the reading in the body chapter analyses, this framework explains what it means for educators to prophetically employ rhetorical strategies in their teaching to encourage hope and bear witness to injustice.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Communication researchers have been interested in the communicative process of teaching and learning for several decades. Preiss & Wheelless (2014) note that communication education traditionally emphasized teaching communication educators how to teach communication effectively. These scholars were (and many still are) interested in the teaching of public speaking, interpersonal communication, and small group communication. By the 1970s, communication scholars became interested in communication education beyond public speaking and communication skills, as they focused more attention on the role of communication in teaching other subjects. Thus, instructional communication became a separate area of inquiry from communication education. Conley and Ah Yun (2017) note that scholars grew increasingly interested in “the role communication played in the general process of teaching and learning” (p. 452). Instructional communication has since been defined as research investigating the communicative dynamics of teaching and learning relative to the exchange of meanings between and among teachers and students, situated in any context or setting, about any subject matter (Myers, 2010).

In 1992, communication scholar Jo Sprague offered an agenda-setting essay in *Communication Education* to advance the scope of instructional communication scholarship from a critical approach. Sprague (1992) posed six questions about expanding instructional communication in her essay. One question specifically focused on language function as she asked: “How does language function in education” (p. 13)? In chartering a critical agenda for instructional communication, Sprague (1992) contended that:

If language does not transmit meaning but rather constitutes meaning, whose language (and thus whose meanings) should be allowed in educational discourse? What sorts of meanings are being created in educational talk? What changes in our use of language could bring about different ways of thinking and living? (p. 17)

Scholars of instructional communication still grapple with Sprague's (1992) questions almost 30 years later as they provoke a needful conversation about how some cultural ways are systemically marginalized, demonized, and unnecessarily scrutinized.

Conversations centered on language and identity commonly reveal that the struggle over which languages or discourses are tolerated or privileged in society are decisions about whose reality will prevail. Smitherman (1977) puts it this way, "the issue regarding language difference and deficit are concerns with sociolinguistic etiquette and the norms of the white middle class" (p. 203). In other words, the white ways of speaking are what become "the invisible, 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" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 171). Cultural communication theorists and scholars have noted that cultural groups often define themselves partly through language, which makes language more about *being* than *speaking* (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). This suggests that language is partly the embodiment of one's cultural and racial identity. The problem is that many minoritized languages (e.g., Black Language, Chicano/a English, Lumbee English) are endangered as the struggle for survival continues to be contested on the inequitable terrain of whiteness and western thought. Thus, as Sprague (1992) states, "struggles for voice in any setting also represent the political tensions between centralized power and the expression of social and individual identity" (p. 14). However, what almost goes unnoticed in these assertions about the struggle for

linguistic survival and voice is that someone is actually “doing the struggling” or engaged in the struggle for what has come to be known as linguistic justice. In schools, and language education particularly, linguistic justice describes the commitment and the challenge of critical language awareness in which teachers and researchers—whom I call critical language teacher-scholar-activists—adopt an empowering orientation to language and literacy instruction (Achugar, 2015; Clark et al., 1990; Crookes, 2021; Fairclough, 2014).

This dissertation examines the rhetorical discourses of three critical Black Language teacher-scholar-activists through the lens of Black or African American prophetic rhetoric. This transdisciplinary project aims to expand the conversation regarding the role of rhetorical communication in the activity of instruction. Understanding rhetoric's role, function, and effects in teaching is essential, especially given the limited view of some instructional communication scholars regarding rhetorical behaviors in instruction. For instance, some argue that the rhetorical approach is more linear where teachers are the primary sources of messages. In contrast, the relational approach many suggest is more about relationship-building and ongoing connections with students (Farris, Houser, & Housek, 2018). These scholars view the rhetorical focus as “talking at” students and the relational focus as “co-creating with” students. Such a view of rhetorical processes in teaching and instruction maintains a narrow understanding of how rhetoric functions within instructional discourses; after all, “rhetoric is a practical discipline; it has a strong tradition that merges theory and *praxis* in the concrete conditions of performance...” (Hauser, 2004, p. 42). How, then, can rhetoric be limited to “talking at” students when, at its core, rhetoric is a teaching discipline through which students develop the capacity to speak or write effectively as situations demand (Leff, 2009)?

The rhetorical perspective has also been understood to facilitate effective classroom instruction or shape instructional messages to influence students' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Beebe & Mottet, 2009; Myers et al., 2018). These scholars also believe that relational instructional communication enables instructors and students to mutually create an affective learning environment where both parties are concerned with each other's emotions and well-being. I suggest that analyzing instruction through the lens of Black or African American prophetic rhetoric offers additional nuance to how teaching, in and out of the classroom, functions rhetorically to empower students with a critical, sociopolitical consciousness and with the rhetorical resources needed to engage in the struggle for liberation and justice. As I have said elsewhere, "understanding teaching as a form of prophesying, or pedagogy as a form of prophecy, reinforces the belief that teaching not only informs students but changes them as well" (Smith, 2020, p. 232). This comes to bear on McLaren and Dantley's (1990) early arguments for educators to understand and "appropriate pedagogically the fundamentals of the African American prophetic tradition" (p. 40) as a way of achieving a radical social reform in critical pedagogy. To this end, this dissertation asks what rhetorical strategies, movements, or features are employed in the instruction of critical Black language awareness and how the African American prophetic tradition informs those choices.

In the balance of this chapter, I review related literature that centers on various aspects of prophetic rhetoric and critical language awareness within the African American cultural context. I then provide a clear, in-depth explanation of my method of analysis. I conclude this chapter with an overview of selected texts, a preview of the coming chapters, and a brief discussion of final observations.

## Review of Related Literature

### Prophetic Rhetoric

According to Majocha (2016), a comprehensive search of the term “prophetic rhetoric” in communication studies and religious communication reveals discrete, yet not necessarily contradictory, contexts for the concept. For example, in religious communication studies, the term has been in studies where scholars aim to extract the essences of the rhetoric of prophets for use in identifying prophetic-like conditions in rhetoric. However, scholars have traced much of the study of prophetic rhetoric in rhetorical/communication studies to the works of James Darcey. In his foundational text, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, Darcey (1997) notes that though restricted to the Greco-Roman tradition, the study of rhetorical theory has long been “a line of inheritance that runs from Plato and Aristotle through Cicero, Quintilian... to contemporary times and figures such as Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman, there is evidence of a body of rhetorical practice that has its roots in very different tradition” (pp. 15-16). As Johnson (2010) writes, prophetic rhetoric descended from the Hebraic tradition found in the writings of the Old Testament in which there is no systematic theory of rhetoric. Thus, to work with or analyze prophetic rhetoric, one must “suspend modern tendencies toward rationalized incredulity” (p. 270) and be willing to grapple with prophetic speech or discourse that is only understood incompletely.

Prophetic rhetoric has been criticized as a field of study. One reason scholars have had difficulty accepting the heuristic value of prophetic rhetoric centers on its perceived inexactness and incompleteness. Thus, rhetorical scholars have worked to defend a space for studying “the prophet” and “prophecy” in rhetorical scholarship. For example, Johnson (2010) defines prophetic rhetoric as:

a discourse grounded in the sacred and rooted in a community experience that offers a critique of existing communities and traditions by charging and challenges society to live up to the ideals espoused while offering celebration and hope for a brighter future. (pp. 270-271)

It is, as he says, a rhetoric that focuses on the rights of individuals—especially the poor, marginalized, and exploited members of society. Johnson (2020) writes: “My own work on prophetic rhetoric has been heavily logos-driven. I have been more concerned with how one identifies prophetic rhetoric... my aim has been to identify whether or not a rhetor adopted a prophetic persona” (p. 151). Drawing on the work of James Darsey, Johnson (2020) argues that any piece of prophetic rhetoric affects how it is analyzed or examined. Thus, one cannot separate the rhetoric from the prophet or the conditions that compelled the prophet to speak.

Some of the earlier works of rhetorical criticism that contributed to the understanding of prophecy and the prophetic highlighted two types of prophetic discourse—apocalyptic and the jeremiad (Brummett, 1991; Reid, 1983). Apocalyptic rhetoric is “a mode of thought or discourse that empowers its audience to live in a time of disorientation or disorder by revealing to them a fundamental plan within the cosmos” (Brummett, 1991, p. 9). In contrast, the more popular and political type of prophetic discourse is the jeremiad which derives from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. This form of prophetic rhetoric was to sustain the ideology of a manifest destiny espoused in the earliest days of American society. Johnson (2010) notes that an inherent feature of the jeremiad is that it never questions what is sacred—that is, “it blindly supports the beliefs and traditions that the society itself has created” (p. 272). Here, Johnson (2010) struggles with the earlier conceptions of prophetic rhetoric implicitly Eurocentric in nature. Indeed, Johnson and Stone (2018) argue that much of the study of prophetic rhetoric negate the



contributions of African American scholars and those who study African American prophetic rhetoric. For this reason, Johnson (2020) notes that “I have also been concerned with the whiteness of the field, therefore framing much of my study of the tradition within the African American variety” (p. 151).

### ***African American Prophetic Rhetoric***

African American speakers have used both types of prophetic rhetoric (i.e., apocalyptic, jeremiad) to raise the American consciousness about the promise of liberty and freedom for all, hoping that America might repent and return their promise. According to Gilyard and Banks (2018), the most celebrated rhetorical expression of the integrationist strain of African American rhetoric has been the African American jeremiad, otherwise known as the Black jeremiad. Howard-Pitney (1986) defined the Black jeremiad as the term for “the constant warning issued by blacks to whites concerning the judgment that was to come from the sin of slavery” (p. 24). The African American jeremiad is an astute variation of what the early puritans employed in their religious rhetoric. Given their circumstances, including their exposure to evangelical Protestantism, many Black folx began to view themselves as a chosen people, however much they suffered. According to Gilyard and Banks (2018), within the parameters of the African American jeremiad, Black folx considered themselves to be “the chosen redeemers whom America had to acknowledge properly if it were to live up to the ideal of liberty for all” (p. 31).

Despite their widespread use, Johnson (2012) argues that not all prophetic discourse fits the apocalyptic and jeremiad types. He argues that a defining feature of prophetic rhetoric is hope. Johnson (2012) notes that “the prophet/speaker has been grim about the prospects of what she is championing, but typically ends her speech in a hopeful or encouraging declaration” (pp. 8-9). It is this hope that Johnson (2012) questions when he asks:

What happens when a speaker cannot use or appropriate an apocalyptic or jeremiadic appeal? What if the speaker does not believe that God will cause a cataclysmic event that will bring in a new age? What if the speaker does not appeal to a covenant—or for that matter, does not believe the covenant is available to the people? What if the covenant itself is the problem—can one still engage in prophetic discourse? (p. 10)

These questions lead Johnson (2012) to theorize a paradigm that consolidates African American rhetorical and prophetic epistemologies—that is, the African American Prophetic Tradition in which “speakers [had to] develop other forms of prophetic discourse in order to appeal to and move their audience” (p. 10). Watkins-Dickerson (2020) characterizes the African American Prophetic Tradition as “the moment in which the sacred and the secular, much like the blues and the gospel, converge upon one another in the Black rhetorical moment” (p. 97). Such moments are sites of rhetorical agency for African American people. As Johnson (2016) argues, the African American Prophetic Tradition does not originate in freedom. He continues by stating: “Birthed from slavery and Jim and Jane Crow America, the African American version of the prophetic tradition has been the primary vehicle that has comforted and given voice to many African Americans” (p. 22). This tradition is inherently dualistic, whereby African Americans celebrate divine intervention but also critique divine delay.

The dualism that marks the African American Prophetic Tradition is reflected in the earlier thoughts of Cornel West (1988), who notes that Black prophetic practices “reveal the strengths and shortcomings, the importance and impotence, of prophetic activities in recalcitrant America” (p. 41). Informed by Christian, womanist, and socialist ideologies, West (1988) characterizes Black prophetic practices into three distinct features. First, Black prophetic practices maintain a deep-seated moralism. By this, West (1988) suggests that African American

prophetic practices are grounded in a moralistic conception of the world in which ethical ideals or moral standards measure right and wrong human actions. Second, Black prophetic practices reveal an inescapable opportunism, suggesting that African Americans' prophetic practices reflect the opportunistic practices Black folk must often pursue to satisfy unmet needs. Finally, Black prophetic practices reflect an aggressive pessimism. West (1988) notes that most prophetic practices among African Americans have given this pessimism an aggressiveness such that it becomes "sobering rather than disabling, a stumbling block rather than a dead end, a challenge to meet rather than a conclusion to accept" (p. 42). While West's explication of the prophetic tradition in African America does reflect the hope that Johnson (2012) marks as inherent in prophetic rhetoric—"an earthy hope" (p. 9)—West (1988) does not come to bear on the construction of the prophetic message or the prophetic persona. So, his commentary offers, as his book title suggests, "fragments" of the African American Prophetic Tradition.

### ***Types of African American Prophetic Rhetoric***

Johnson (2012) extends the conversation of prophetic rhetoric by conceptualizing four (4) types of prophetic rhetoric as informed by the African American Rhetorical Tradition. These include: (a) celebratory prophecy, (b) disputation prophecy, (c) mission-oriented prophecy, and (d) pessimistic prophecy. The first is "celebratory prophecy," which Johnson (2012) defines as "a prophecy, typically grounded in a sacred covenant that calls the people to celebrate an event that leads the people to celebrate the sacred (covenant)" (p. 10). In this type of prophetic rhetoric, the event is linked to the "will of God" and becomes a sacred event worthy of celebration.

The second type of prophecy used by African Americans is what Johnson (2012) calls "prophetic disputation" or "disputation prophecy," which occurs when the speaker offers a quotation of the people's opinion within the speech context and offers a refutation that corrects

this opinion. According to Johnson (2012), prophetic disputations function rhetorically primarily because they give the speaker a chance not only to speak about the evils perpetrated by his opponents but also “to do so in a way that creates a sense of empowerment, not only for the speaker but also for the community the speaker represents” (p. 13).

The third type of prophecy that Johnson (2012) argues is used by African Americans is called “mission-oriented” prophecy. Johnson (2012) defines a mission-oriented prophecy as “a constitutive rhetoric that calls a people to participate in a divine mission by reconstituting the people from their perceived identities” (p. 13). According to Johnson (2012), while a constitutive rhetoric assumes that audiences are already a rhetorical effect and uses that identity to shape the message, “a mission-oriented prophecy finds the constructed identities problematic and offers a new vision or identity for the people” (p. 13). In this type of prophetic rhetoric, the prophet works to reconstitute the people in an identity that would fit the divine call.

The final type of prophetic rhetoric that Johnson (2012) explains is “pessimistic prophecy” or “prophetic lament,” which he says is “both pessimistic and hopeful at the same time” (p. 14)—reinforcing the inherent dualism that I mentioned earlier. In the lament tradition of prophecy, African American speakers speak out on the behalf of others and chronicle their pain and suffering as well as their own. Johnson (2012) argues that by speaking, “the prophet offers hope and encouragement to others by acknowledging their sufferings and letting them know that they are not alone” (p. 14).

### ***The Prophetic Persona***

Through the lens of prophetic rhetoric, speakers are characterized as prophets not because they are prophets per se but because they are believed to adopt “a rhetorical strategy of persona in order to get [their] messages heard” (Johnson, 2012, p. 16). I contend that critical Black

language teacher-scholar-activists adopt a prophetic persona when engaged in the instructional discourses of critical language awareness. Johnson (2012) describes four types of prophetic personae. The first is a universal/covenantal prophetic persona in which “the prophet sees herself as prophet to all the people and grounded in the sacred covenant of the people” (p. 16). The second is a representative prophet who “represents the issues of a particular group” (p. 17). The third prophetic persona is called a pragmatic prophetic. This type of prophet seeks out partners in the prophetic enterprise. The fourth prophetic persona is the pessimistic prophet who “chronicles the pain and sufferings of the people...” (p. 17).

The African American Prophetic Tradition maintains an inherent critical, dualistic nature that provides the terrain to critique dominant power structures and argue for a more democratic, humane, and culturally sustaining society. This is reflected in the work of critical language teacher-scholar-activists. Johnson’s (2012) conception of African American prophetic rhetoric and its subsequent rhetorical structure provides a lens through which to analyze the instructional rhetoric of critical language awareness in various contexts. Specific to my interests that emerge at the intersections of language, race, power, and identity, prophetic rhetoric can be used to better inform the instructional discourse of critical language awareness. I suggest that understanding the prophetic persona and subsequent rhetorical strategies that critical Black language teacher-scholar-activists employ will expand how scholars understand the rhetoric of teaching. Moreover, I suggest this framework will reveal how critical Black language awareness functions as rhetorical action rooted in the controversy of social and political thought in the U.S. and the diaspora.

## **Critical Language Awareness**

The term Critical Language Awareness (CLA) was coined over 25 years ago– “at the time when there was considerable interest in increasing the amount of explicit ‘Knowledge About Language’ in the curriculum in British schools” (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p.8). CLA theorists, such as Fairclough (1992), criticized dominant academic discourse practices due to its tendency to dehumanize second and foreign language learners. Instead, they advocated for pluralistic academic discourse practices rooted in a social, political, and ideological awareness of language and language variation. Fairclough (1992) indicates this practice leads toward equity and access (i.e., democratic citizenship) for second and foreign language learners. According to Wallace (1998), CLA pedagogy allows second and foreign language learners to significantly draw on and extend their existing linguistic repertoire. It also allows them to cultivate their critical literacy skills, thereby allowing them to engage with talk and text successfully and critically in broader academic and social arenas. This critical approach to language, Alim (2010) claims, has “the potential to help students and teachers abandon old, restrictive and repressive ways of thinking about language and to re-socialize them into new, expansive and emancipatory ways of thinking about language and power” (pp. 227-228).

According to Godley and Reaser (2018), CLA is “a branch of critical discourse analysis that posits that a critical examination of the power structures reflected and created through language is essential to all language and literacy education” (p. 21). CLA pedagogies draw on Paulo Freire’s theory of critical literacy, which links the critical examination of power structures inherent in everyday objects and practices with the action needed to change power structures (Godley & Reaser, 2018). This Freirean critical pedagogy of language educates linguistically profiled and marginalized students about how language is used and, more importantly, how

language can be used against them (Alim, 2010). Through CLA, critical language teacher-scholar-activists and their students interrogate the dominating discourse on language and literacy and foreground the examination and interconnectedness of identities, ideologies, histories/herstories, and the hierarchical nature of power relations between groups (Alim, 2005; 2010). Given this, critical language awareness is a framework grounded in instructional discourse approaches that contribute to the academic success of culturally and linguistically diverse students, whose language and literacy practices are often marginalized. This research project is particularly interested in language use in African America (e.g., African American Language or Black Language).

### *Understanding African American Language*

Jackson et al. (2020) note that Black English—or as I prefer to call it, African American Language (AAL)—is “a Creole language formed by combining Mainstream American English and native African languages, evolving from largely West African pidgin forms” (p. 94). This definition acknowledges AAL's relationship with Black folx and our African heritage. Some view AAL as a dialect of Mainstream American English (MAE). As Mitchell (1972) noted:

In America, a diabolical combination of racism, class snobbery, and naïveté has caused Blacks as well as whites to assume, consciously and unconsciously, that there is a single proper American English, and that the language spoken by most Black people is a crude distortion of it. (p. 88)

This dialect position interprets AAL from a deficit-deficiency perspective, or what Jackson et al. (2020) call a Eurocentric vision which only describes what appears “missing” or grammatically “incorrect” due to ignorance about the structure and history of AAL. Smitherman (2006) contends that “the question of whether we talk about African American “Dialect” or African

American “Language” is complicated by the sociopolitical—not the linguistic—nature of the question” (p. 16). The bottom line, she concludes, is that languages evolve from peoplehood and nationhood, and such is the history of AAL. Delpit (2002) contends that our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. She notes that:

In our mother’s wombs we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our “mother tongue” ... Our home language is viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself—as the sweet sounds of love accompany our first milk, as our father’s pride permeates our bones and flesh when he shows us off to his friends, as a gentle lullaby or soft murmurs signal release into restful sleep. It is no wonder that our first language becomes intimately connected to our identity. (p. xix)

Smitherman (2006) and Delpit (2002) suggest that a culturally linguistic identity emerges from a common experience. Hence, AAL can be understood as language spoken by or among African Americans.

AAL, like any variety, is part of a community, socioculture, and history. AAL is a linguistic form of identity through which its speakers are always connected to Mother Africa. Lanehart (2015) notes that AAL is inextricably linked with “American slave descendants, forged from pain, hardship, family, NOMMO (the Afrocentric concept meaning “the power of the Word”), tradition, memory, community, spirituality, perseverance, and strength” (p. 867). AAL helps form a collective identity among African Americans. By collective identity, I index the Afrocentric concept, which defines the connection to one’s ancestors and community as a permanent, circular relationship. This collective identity brings a collective responsibility to celebrate, continue, and contribute to the African cultural legacy. Thus, as Baker-Bell (2020) writes, “Black speech is the continuation of African in an American context” (p. 3), and to this



end, speaking and/or learning about or through AAL is about connecting an African past to the African American present.

Smitherman (2006) notes that AAL is a style of speaking English words with “Black flava—with Africanized semantic, grammatical, pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns” (p. 3). Features such as signifyin, semantic inversion, and call and response are a few examples of the Black cultural modes of discourse that have survived for generations in the Black community (Baker-Bell, 2017). As Smitherman (2006) says, the Africanization of U.S. English has been passed on from one generation to the next, and each new generation stamps its own linguistic imprint on the language. This is noted in the roots of African American speech which lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant class. Boutte (2016) notes that historically African Americans have had “to speak in codes that others could not understand ... so that White enslavers could not detect them” (pp. 114-115). To this end, AAL has been a fundamental tool in African American rhetoric since the time of slavery to navigate oppression and as a rhetorical strategy to escape to freedom.

### ***Code-switching and Code-meshing***

This history of secret linguistic codes among African Americans has continued to be a rhetorical strategy and social practice when navigating culturally different worlds. Code-switching is a common rhetorical strategy African Americans have used or been encouraged to use. In communication and linguistic terms, many scholars refer to this as code-switching. Jackson et al. (2020) define code-switching as “the selective use of Black English and Mainstream American English depending on the situation” (p. 100). The concept is rooted in the understanding that African Americans should learn to identify what language is acceptable in

different contexts and modify their speech to the “appropriate” style. As I have mentioned, this notion of code-switching has a long-standing history in the African American tradition dating back to slavery. Enslaved people found this rhetorical strategy helpful to communicate with each other without their enslavers being aware. Hence, code-switching is broader in scope and practice involving more than just shifts in language.

Alim and Smitherman (2012) note that “In much the same way that many bilingual/bicultural Americans *codeswitch* between two languages, many bilingual/bicultural Americans *styleshift*—move in and out of linguistic styles...” (p. 5). Alim and Smitherman (2012) argue that Obama’s family history, diverse life experiences, and socialization within multiple cultures within and beyond the U.S. are likely what shaped his styleshifting skills. They note that his ability to styleshift mirrors many Black Americans who travel in and out of Black and white social worlds and work environments. Hence, code-switching and style-shifting emerge as rhetorical strategies in response to the social and political notions of appropriateness that frame languages within the discourses of power and hegemony.

Code-switching in Black communities might be more adequately described pragmatically through what W.E.B. Du Bois has described as a double consciousness. Du Bois (1903/2014) defines a double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 15). Through this concept, code-switching can be understood as an African American literacy that functions for Black folx to navigate in and between Black and white worlds. Such a Black cultural discourse, as Alim and Smitherman (2012) argue, denotes an African American-centered literacy through which Obama was able to navigate the world of politics while sustaining a connection with Black and non-Black audiences. Hence, as Myers (2020) notes,

code-switching is a metaphor for the duality that often exists in Black Americans. However, inherent in this linguistic duality, or double consciousness, is the notion of linguistic hegemony that undergirds code-switching as a social practice in Black communities.

Linguistic hegemony is used as a vehicle of power to isolate minoritized languages. Indeed, marginalized groups are expected to become more like the dominant cultural group—to assimilate to the dominant language. Black respectability politics are sustained through this hegemonic process of linguistic ideology as many Black folx have been led to believe that standardized language practices are linked to upward social mobility. As Alim and Paris (2015) note, despite widely professed values of egalitarianism, equality, or equity, “linguistic hegemony is framed as beneficial to linguistic “minorities” rather than harmful, and linguistic homogenization is presented as preferable to linguistic diversity” (p. 79). As such, linguistic hegemony functions as a means of cultural erasure to which oppressed groups succumb, consciously or unconsciously. As Lanehart (2015) notes, people who use what are called nonstandard varieties of English, as AAL is often called, come to believe in the “myth of standard English” (p. 868), which leads to self-hate in African American communities because that is what society and history teaches—that is, being Black is not being white and not being white is a problem. Thus, code-switching practices and pedagogies index a sociopolitical controversy within the African American rhetorical tradition.

Borrowing on Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness, Smitherman (2006) coined the term “linguistic push-pull” which she describes as “Black folk loving, embracing, using Black Talk, while simultaneously rejecting and hating on it...” (p. 6). This form of self-hate has been a concern for Black educators for nearly a hundred years, as Woodson (1933/2006) notes:

In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken African tongue—in short to understand their own linguistic history, which certainly was more important to them than the study of French Phonetics or Historical Spanish Grammar. (p. 12)

This struggle between Eurocentric and Afrocentric ways of doing and speaking has been a particularly salient aspect of African American rhetorical theory and practice. For example, Asante (1972) contends that “any interpretation of African rhetoric must begin at once to dispense with the notion that in all things Europe is teacher and Africa is pupil” (p. 363). Implicit in Asante’s analysis is a critique of the foundations of Western rhetorical thought. According to McPhail (2003), Asante “emphasizes the expressive and embodied dimensions of language largely neglected or subordinated by traditional Western rhetorical theory and criticism ...” (p. 101). In other words, Black or African discursive practices are too often subverted in western conceptions of rhetoric and communication, perpetuating linguistic hegemony at the core of code-switching pedagogies.

Baker-Bell (2017) problematizes code-switching pedagogies arguing that “code-switching is a response to technical differences between Black Language and White Mainstream English but ignores the racial and cultural tensions that underlie such pedagogies” (p. 103). She contends that classifying AAL as informal “legitimizes a hierarchy that produces Blackness and Black Language as inferior and Whiteness and White Mainstream American English as superior” (p. 103). Young (2009) argues that the code-switching approach implies a racist, segregationist response to the language habits of African Americans. He argues that “the most unlikely people accept code switching because American racial logic exaggerates the differences between black

and white people, which leads to exaggerations between black and white languages” (p. 59). Young (2009) calls for a move toward code-meshing.

Young (2010) defines code-meshing as blending “dialects, internal languages, local idioms, chat room lingo, and the rhetorical styles of various ethnic and cultural groups in both formal *and* informal speech acts” (p. 114). He argues that code-meshing benefits everyone and that by teaching the rhetorical devices of Black students, we allow “black people to play both the black and white keys on the piano at the very same time, creating beautiful linguistic performances...” (p. 60). That is to say that code-meshing allows minoritized people to become more effective communicators by doing what we all do best, what comes naturally: blending, merging, and meshing language variations. Hence, code-meshing serves as a rhetorical function for Black folk (and others) as it provides yet another rhetorical tool to navigate the double consciousness inherent in the Black experience.

### ***Critical BLACK Language Awareness***

Through CLA, critical Black language teacher-scholar-activists positively impact Black culture and rhetorical expression. As Smitherman (2001) has rightly explained, “For those of us who live and work in the Black community, the study of African American Language is not just an academic exercise, it is our life” (p. xi). Alim (2010) notes that CLA approaches connect meaningfully with local contexts by viewing local cultures and language practices as powerful resources for learning. Godley and Reaser (2018) argue that CLA allows educators to (a) validate students’ home languages while adding other languages (or dialects) to their repertoires, (b) recognize that language and identity are interwoven and that students may experience conflicts between the language varieties they use outside school and those valued in school, and (c) acknowledge that racial, linguistic, and other forms of discrimination exist and that society

unfairly privileges some dialects and discriminates against others. In the context of AAL, these aims restore a love for AAL speaking students because, as Godley and Minnici (2008) contend, “such students are often negatively affected in material, economic, and emotional ways by dominant, “commonsense” views of AAVE as illogical, ungrammatical, or unintelligent” (pp. 320-21).

Smitherman (2015) notes that the relationship between AAL and education can be characterized in terms of three language ideologies, each creating controversy in the educational community and spreading to the broader national and international professional community and the lay public:

- (a) AAL is viewed as illustrative of Blacks’ cognitive and/or sociocultural deficiencies, thus mandating the need for specialized language education programs and “dialect readers” for Black students;
- (b) AAL is viewed as indicative of learning disabilities and communication disorders in Black students. This language ideology was highlighted in the widely discussed public controversy surrounding *King v. Ann Arbor* (the “Black English” federal course case, 1977-79); and
- (c) the US variety, labeled as “Ebonics,” is viewed as one of several “relatives” of the African language family found in postcolonial and post-enslavement communities. This language ideology was highlighted in the public controversy revolving around the Oakland School Board’s Resolution on Ebonics issued in December 1996. (pp. 547-48)

In articulating these language ideologies, Smitherman (2015) chronicles a history of battles in the language wars centered on AAL use in education. At the same time, this chronology reveals the

long history in which African American linguists, educators, scholars, and the like have fought for linguistic justice in schools and the impact that fight has had in other social institutions such as courts (Jones et al., 2019) and housing (Baugh, 2016). As Smitherman (1998) notes, “when the Oakland school board passed its Ebonics resolution in December 1996, its action was a continuation of a struggle over language and education that goes back decades” (p. 163).

Smitherman references the 1979 verdict of the *King v. Ann Arbor* case in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which set a legal precedent establishing that Black English falls within the parameters of the statutory language of the Equal Education Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1974, but more broadly, her point indexes the continual struggle and fight for Students’ Rights to Their Own Language (SRTOL). Specifically, SRTOL is a resolution that seeks “to enlighten on language attitudes, promote the value of linguistic diversity, and convey information on language and language variation that would enable teachers to teach more effectively” (Gold, Hobbs, and Berlin, 2012, p. 247). The resolution was first adopted in 1974 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication and was reaffirmed twice in 2003 and 2014. However, in her own critique of SRTOL, Smitherman (2017) argues that “Although the SRTOL was solidly grounded in the 1960s theoretical advancement in linguistics by Chomsky, Hymes and other linguists, our work fell short in terms of linking language theory to teaching practice” (p. 10). Consequently, she writes:

a strategic dimension of The Way Forward is for language arts teachers to implement pedagogies of Critical Language Awareness (CLA)... Thus, it has become the calling of a succeeding generation of teacher-scholars to develop pedagogy, curricula and classroom practices for implementing the theory of student language rights... (p. 9)

Hence, the fight for SRTOL must reflect the efforts of critical language teacher-scholar-activists who continuously seek to achieve linguistic justice for culturally and linguistically diverse students (e.g., AAL speakers) in and outside the classroom.

Many critical language teacher-scholar-activists advocate the use of critical Black language awareness. For example, Baker-Bell (2013) implemented critical language pedagogy in a study and revealed that it was useful in getting Black students to critically interrogate dominant notions of language and develop a critical and cultural understanding of the historical, cultural, and political underpinnings of Black Language (Baker-Bell, 2013). Likewise, Metz (2021), though not a Black scholar, has found that valuing student knowledge was particularly important for teaching critical language awareness because the distinctions between linguistic and common-sense definitions represent a form of language variation. He argues this was particularly important in reshaping students' attitudes about AAL—understanding it as a language and not mere slang. Baker-Bell (2019) notes that in her work, she employs critical language pedagogy as a: (a) framework for understanding the relationship between dominant language ideologies, negative language attitudes, identity, and student learning, and (b) a consciousness-raising approach that provides a critical and cultural understanding of Black Language to foster positive language attitudes among Black students. As these studies suggest, critical language awareness is a necessary and effective framework through which critical Black language teacher-scholar-activists can engage students and audiences to better grapple with the socio-politics of racist-classist language ideologies that affect AAL speakers.

Therefore, the work of critical Black language teacher-scholar-activists is important as they aim to respond to the anti-black linguistic racism in schools (and other social institutions) with a cry for linguistic justice—“a call to create an education system where Black students, their



language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their expression, their resistance MATTERS” (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 3).

### **Methods**

In this dissertation, I render an analysis of three rhetorical texts using Black or African American prophetic rhetoric as a theoretical framework. As I have noted, prophetic rhetoric is inherently critical. Johnson (2012) argues that prophetic rhetoric acts as a social criticism because it challenges the leaders, the conventions, and the ritual practices of society. As such, prophetic rhetoric is considered critical rhetoric that “examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Johnson (2012) delineates prophetic rhetoric into a four-part rhetorical structure within the African American cultural legacy. First, speakers ground prophetic discourse in what the speaker and audience deem sacred. Second, there is an element of consciousness-raising through a sharing or announcement of the real situation. Third, there is a charge, challenge, critique, judgment, or warning of the audience. Finally, the speaker offers encouragement and hope.

This four-part rhetorical structure is helpful, in many ways, in examining and exploring critical approaches to language instruction, such as critical Black language awareness. First, the rhetoric of critical pedagogy can be characterized as a sacred discourse. By this, I contend that critical classroom discourses which center on ideals of democracy and social justice are valuable and important to educators and their students. Second, the rhetoric of critical pedagogy involves consciousness-raising. This is evident in Paulo Freire’s concept of conscientization—a critical consciousness—which is defined as “the process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 14). This practice is

inherently persuasive as rhetorical scholars have identified awareness, or consciousness-raising, as the first step toward persuasive communication (Turner et al., 2018). The third part of prophetic rhetoric's rhetorical structure reveals how critical pedagogy is used to challenge or critique. This involves critiquing dominant, oppressive ideologies that students espouse or challenging students to use their power, influence, or resources to create antiracist policies or interventions. Finally, critical language pedagogy offers hope and encouragement for a more equitable, just, and democratic society.

In this dissertation, I maintain that critical pedagogies constitute a prophetic rhetoric as they are a form of a critical rhetoric that grapples with issues of power, domination, oppression, and hegemony as they impact marginalized cultural groups marked by race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other interlocking systems of domination. Likewise, because critical Black language awareness is a critical pedagogy, I argue that it is also a prophetic rhetoric in which teacher-scholar-activists: (a) engage in a sacred discourse that advances ideals of linguistic justice, (b) seek to raise awareness about racist, classist language histories, ideologies, practices, and policies, (c) challenge and critique raciolinguistic ideologies that sustain linguistic hegemony, discrimination, and linguicism, and (d) offer hope and encouragement for a better way forward.

## **Methodology**

As a method of analysis, I use close textual analysis, or close reading, which “seeks to study the relationship between the inner workings of public discourse and its historical context to discover what makes a particular text function persuasively” (Burghardt, 2000, p. 545). Brummett (2019) defines close reading as “the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings” (p. 2). This suggests that a text comprises many

layers of meaning and understanding which, through close reading, can be excavated and carefully analyzed to reveal its means and strategies of persuasion. Close reading allows me to look at the most minute details of my selected texts to ascertain their importance, implications, historical claims, and strategic rhetorical choices and effects.

Close reading evaluates a rhetorical discourse as it arises out of a particular situation and provides the necessary tools to determine if the discourse offers a fitting response to that situation. This process reflects rhetoric's pedagogic history. As Leff (1993) writes, "the function of rhetorical performance is to encompass specific situations and circumstances" (cited in de Velasco, Campbell, & Henry, 2016, p. 446). Close reading, then, fulfills a function of rhetorical pedagogy as it is a tool to understand better how a rhetorical text responds to specific situations and intervenes in public situations to alter them through persuasive discourse (Leff, 2000). Through a close reading of a text, contextual nuances of the discourse emerge. Such nuances might include temporal and historical influences, cultural practices and epistemologies, dominant and counter ideologies, significant theoretical and practical concepts, and myriad ideals that work together or against each other to produce the text.

A close reading of selected texts compares the messages and arguments contained within to the larger context outside of the texts uncovering arguments that point to a widening diversity of ideas (Woodall, 2014). Specifically, I use close reading to unearth features of prophetic rhetoric within the selected texts to create a profile of the speakers' prophetic personae. In doing so, I aim to advance the scholarship related to African American prophetic rhetoric by revealing how it is employed in the rhetoric of teaching and pedagogy. In this close text analysis, I take on the baton of Black prophetic rhetoric from scholars who have primarily applied the framework to preaching and political discourses. Through this analysis, I continue the legacy of the African

American prophetic tradition by applying it to the public pedagogies of three critical Black teacher-scholar-activists to provide a glimpse of how critical educators adopt a prophetic persona to promulgate the rhetoric of critical Black language awareness.

### **Selected Texts**

Many Black teacher-scholar-activists are engaged in the language wars of critical language awareness. Since Lorenzo Dow Turner's crucial shift in the research of African American linguistics, scholars have become increasingly interested in studying and advocating for Black or African American languages in the United States and other parts of the African diaspora (Lanehart, 2015; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman 1977, 2006). In this study, I analyze the instructional discourses of three critical Black Language teacher-scholar-activists: (a) April Baker-Bell, (b) Jamila Lyiscott, and (c) Anne Charity Hudley. Selecting the instructional rhetors came down to the following criteria. First, each speaker is undeniably and unapologetically Black. Second, each speaker is committed to critical language awareness in schools and education, as evidenced by their scholarship and activism (Baker-Bell, 2013, 2017, 2020; Hudley et al., 2022; Lyiscott, 2017, 2019).

Each of texts that I analyze is mediated insofar as it can be accessed freely online but also in the way each text is rooted within a mediated public sphere and maintains a mediated public. As such, they constitute what Henry A. Giroux and other scholars in education and cultural studies have identified as exemplars of public pedagogy. Public pedagogies have been described as producing critical analyses of and interventions within mass culture and media. According to Giroux (2004), this kind of pedagogy "implies that learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings" (p. 62). Specifically, Giroux (2004) argues that pedagogy is not simply about the social construction of knowledge, values, and experiences; it is also a

performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations. Inherent in Giroux's argument is the understanding that pedagogy, or the practice of teaching, is rhetorical – that is, a performative activity in which theory and praxis are conjoined. This argument disrupts rhetorical perspectives of teaching as merely “talking at” students and amplifies the interplay of rhetorical elements (e.g., rhetors, auditors, texts, institutions) involved in the practice of teaching and instruction.

Giroux (2000) contends that educators play the role as oppositional public intellectuals who work in diverse sites and projects to expand the possibilities for democratic struggles. This is especially salient in the context of critical Black language awareness where Black or African American educators are seen as public intellectuals who attempt to make the best responses to cultural and linguistic diversity, educational opportunities and challenges, written texts, and public deliberations (Gilyard, 2011). Hence, the three rhetors and texts that I analyze here represent contemporary voices along the continuum of Black public intellectuals engaged in the cultural politics that center African American discourses and pedagogy. Framing my selected texts as examples of public pedagogy results in a nuanced understanding of how educators contribute to larger, broader cultural politics. More specific to this dissertation research is the inquisition of how these three critical Black language teacher-scholar-activists use their educational platforms to promote a public pedagogy that prophetically bears witness to linguistic injustice and education inequity.

In chapter 2, I analyze April Baker-Bell's 2020 lecture titled “We Been Knowin': Toward an Antiracist Language & Literacy Education.” In this talk, given at the 2020 Winter Conference of the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, Baker-Bell proposes a set of issues for educators to consider regarding language practice and education. In addition, she argues for the

need to produce antiracist scholarship, praxis, and knowledge that work toward transformation and social change in addressing racial, cultural, and linguistic inequities in language and literacy education. One of this talk's attractive features is how Baker-Bell employs Black feminist and womanist frameworks to engage in critical storytelling that maps out a pedagogical directive for her audience. In particular, the womanist frame indexes a distinct history and heritage of Black language and liberation. Watkins-Dickerson (2023) notes that much of the womanist project was drafted by scholarly research celebrating Black life, language, culture, and religion. More specifically, Watkins-Dickerson (2023) acknowledges womanist sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman whose work she says demonstrates “that culturally relevant language can be liberative...” (p. 199).

Given the increased attention on womanist methods and theory in rhetorical studies, Baker-Bell’s talk provides the discursive space in which to explore what Watkins-Dickerson (2023) describes as “the meanings, methods, and musings of Black female rhetors and the relationships they maintain as necessary to their spiritual, social, communal, psychological, and intellectual survival and thriving” (p. 200). By framing her storytelling through a Black feminist and womanist lens, Baker-Bell provides a rich text that reframes and reimagines critical Black language awareness as a pedagogy of love, radical subjectivity, communalism, and critical engagement. Each is a tenet of womanist thought and a method that deviates from normative frameworks in rhetorical studies. Like prophetic rhetoric, womanist discourses are often intimately tied to religious studies and theology (Johnson, 2015, 2017; Taylor, 2009; Madlock & Glenn, 2021; Watkins-Dickerson, 2023), but there is a noticeable lacuna between prophetic and womanist scholarship in rhetorical studies. Using Baker-Bell’s 2020 lecture, I attempt to build a bridge between these areas through critical Black language awareness.

In chapter 3, I analyze Jamila Lyiscott's 2018 TED Talk titled "Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color." Lyiscott makes the powerful argument that, to honor and legitimize all students, educators must legitimize and honor all their varied forms of written and spoken discourse by practicing "Liberation Literacies" in the classroom. In her talk, Lyiscott offers five principles meant to disrupt linguistic violence and oppression in education and schooling. Each of the principles stems from the paradigm of liberation literacies which Lyiscott exclaims is rooted in liberation theology. Petrella (2016) traces the roots of liberation theology to Latin American Catholicism and argues that its goal was twofold: (a) a rereading of Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed and (b) the construction of historical projects—models of political and economic organization that would replace an unjust status quo. This theological approach has strong connections to critical pedagogy. As I have said elsewhere, liberation theology provided Paulo Freire with other discourse to reconstitute the oppressed as utopians—"as prophets and messengers of hope" (Smith, 2021, p. 10). Hence, by framing her literacy principles through the lens of liberation theology, Lyiscott offers a pedagogical paradigm that is inherently prophetic.

Known for her unique poetic, lyrical style of speech, Lyiscott's TED Talk rhetorically situates critical Black language awareness as what James Cone (1986/2020) describes as "an event of liberation taking place in the black community in which blacks recognize that it is incumbent upon them to throw off the chains of white oppression by whatever means they regard as suitable" (Cone, 2020, "Liberation and Black Theology," para. 5). While Lyiscott advocates for the linguistic liberation of all students, she is especially vocal and passionate about the languages and literacies of Black students. For this reason, I argue that the paradigm she offers is more closely aligned with Black liberation theology which has received some attention in

rhetorical studies (Anderson, 2020; Johnson, 2010). Anderson (2020) notes that Black liberation theology focuses on injustices against African Americans and seeks to liberate them from different forms of oppression—politically, economically, socially, and religiously. In my analysis, I argue that Lyiscott draws on the magic rhetoric of the Black liberation theological frame to prophetically advocate for a fugitive approach to addressing linguistic imperialism in schools.

In chapter 4, I analyze Anne Charity Hudley’s 2020 Duocon talk titled “Black Languages Matter: Learning the Languages and Language Varieties of the Black Diaspora.” In this 2020 talk hosted by Duolingo, Hudley illuminates the influences of Black language on American culture. As Hudley explains, Black Language surpasses common examples in sports and entertainment; instead, she stresses how learning and understanding Black language variations provide insight into various aspects of Black culture, Black people, and Black literacies. As the title suggests, Hudley uses a Black Lives Matter (BLM) framework to advocate for the relevance and legitimacy of languages in the Black diaspora. On the heels of the George Floyd murder and the subsequent protests against police brutality, Hudley’s talk aims to respond to public outcries regarding what to do to help make change and make true the idea that Black lives matter. Hudley’s talk promotes critical Black language awareness as a prophetic discourse that disrupts the narrative of white linguistic hegemony and superiority. Bartholomew, Harris, and Maglalang (2018) argue that BLM, as a movement, is a critical site of analysis for radical transformation. Indeed, Edgar and Johnson (2018) note that BLM is a movement characterized by policy and ideals that strive “to highlight and dismantle anti-black racism and white supremacy and the ways these systems target Black lives” (p. 7).



My analysis of Hudley’s talk focuses on the way she constructs a sort of two-edged sword in her advocacy of Black languages and literacies. On the one hand, she takes on the task of historicizing, contextualizing, and legitimizing Black languages. In doing so, Hudley addresses an audience whose understanding of Black languages and literacies is limited, influenced by white supremacy and coloniality, or both. On the other hand, Hudley’s talk implies another audience—one that is aligned with the ideological framework of BLM. For this audience, Hudley takes on the task of acknowledging, edifying, and providing hope to speakers of Black languages and advocates of Black literacies throughout the diaspora. My analysis leans into how Hudley employs a prophetic persona through a BLM framework to promulgate critical Black language awareness through rhetorical healing.

Finally, in chapter 5, I conclude the study by providing an overview of the findings and some implications for ongoing discussion. I also consider its limitations and look at ways this work might promote further research. These analyses contribute to the understanding of a rhetorical legacy in critical Black language awareness. Still, they also provide the rhetorical terrain upon which to broadly consider rhetoric’s import and function in teaching and instruction. That each rhetor is a Black woman also reveals a promising line of inquiry in critical and intersectional rhetorics that spans racial and gender identities. Furthermore, while these rhetors agree on similar tenets and principles of critical Black language awareness, they approach it in very different rhetorical ways. Baker-Bell uses a womanist lens, articulates through Black vernacular speech, and engages her audience with a rehearsed manuscript presentation style. Lyiscott uses a Black liberation theological lens, articulates through a code-meshed variety of Black Language and Caribbean-creolized English, and engages her audience through lyrically, rhythmic extemporaneous presentation style. Finally, Hudley uses a BLM framework, articulates

through a code-mesh between Black Language and Mainstream American English, and engages her audience in the more stereotypical academic yet extemporaneous presentation style. In short, while each rhetor is committed to the same goal of linguistic justice, rhetorically, they go about it differently.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation research brings teaching and instruction to the forefront as a rhetorical situation in which the cultural politics of Black languages and literacies are prophetically addressed. This is a rhetorical phenomenon deserving of attention as it affects the linguistic and cultural identities of those Black and non-Black communities often marginalized in the classroom. Therefore, while this work focuses on instruction that advocates for the languages and literacies in the Black diaspora, its findings should be transferable to other cultural literacies that transcend racial logic. In analyzing these rhetorical texts through a Black or African American prophetic framework, this research lays the bricks for a path toward prophetic approaches and understandings to pedagogy in myriad subject areas—a pedagogy of love, liberation, and legitimacy.

## CHAPTER 2

### **We Been Knowin’: April Baker-Bell and The Markings of a Womanist Prophetic Rhetoric**

In February 2020, Dr. April Baker-Bell delivered a keynote address at the Journal of Language and Literacy Education’s (JOLLE@UGA) Winter Conference. The title of her address was “We Been Knowin: Toward an Anti-Racist Language & Literacy Education.” In this address, Baker-Bell shares her journey as a teacher, scholar, and activist to explore how she has used language and literacy research and teaching to work against racial, cultural, and linguistic inequities in communities and classrooms. In addition, she shares stories and highlights examples from her personal experiences with injustice and her work with students and teachers to reflect on the past and present state of language and literacy education. Of particular importance, Baker-Bell shares her framework of *Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy* to reflect on how she has built upon anti-racist theories to emphasize the need for an anti-racist language and literacy education and how theory, research, and practice can operate in tandem with the pursuit for racial justice.

Baker-Bell proposes a set of issues for educators to consider regarding language practice and education. In addition, she argues for the need to produce anti-racist scholarship, praxis, and knowledge that work toward transformation and social change in addressing racial, cultural, and linguistic inequities in language and literacy education. Drawing on what she calls a Black feminist-womanist framework, Baker-Bell engages in critical storytelling and reflection that informs her culturally relevant approach to language and literacy education. She maintains that by embracing the language and literacy of Black students, and other students of color, teacher-scholars respond to a radical wake-up call in which they acknowledge how their students experience and give meaning to the world. Through this fundamental anti-racist approach,

Baker-Bell advocates for a pedagogy, a critically instructive discourse, through which teacher-scholars demonstrate their understanding of what Royster (2000) describes as “language/literacy/rhetoric as action” (p. 50) – a means for students to engage actively with problems and a strategy for presenting solutions persuasively to their audiences.

In this chapter, I argue that by framing her storytelling through a womanist lens, Baker-Bell provides a rich rhetorical text that reframes and reimagines critical Black language awareness as a prophetic pedagogy of radical subjectivity, communalism, love, and critical engagement. Moreover, considering the noticeable lacuna between prophetic and womanist scholarship in rhetorical studies, I attempt to build a bridge between prophetic and womanist rhetoric through critical Black language awareness. More specifically, in analyzing Baker-Bell’s address, I begin the work of conceptualizing *womanist prophetic rhetoric* that advances the aims of critical, revolutionary, and culturally relevant ways of teaching.

### **Womanism: Foundations, Framework, & Methodology**

While many scholars have contributed to the interdisciplinary literature of womanist scholarship, the term first began with writer and activist Alice Walker. Walker first used the term *womanist* in her short story “Coming Apart,” but in 1983, in her book *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker articulated a four-part definition for the term *womanist* which has since been the starting point for intellectual engagement in womanism scholarship. Walker (1983) defines *womanist* as:

1. From womanish. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth

than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up.

Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Ans. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.”
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

(Walker, 1983, p. xii)

Scholars have deconstructed and analyzed this definition many times, and each of them arrives at different interpretations that do not surprisingly maintain and advance the same womanist agenda. For instance, Madlock (2021) notes that, in summary, the first part of the definition emphasizes the importance of women handing down their wisdom from one generation of women to the next. The second part highlights the importance of communal thought and action. The third part of the definition critiques the Eurocentric standard of beauty imposed upon Black

women, and the fourth part expresses how womanism itself is used as a counter to the limitations of White feminist thought and activism as it is ineffective in dealing with issues of race and class. In her edited volume *The Womanist Reader*, Phillips (2006) offers an extensive understanding of womanism that builds on Walker's definition. Phillips (2006) writes:

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black Women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/ nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension. (p. xx)

What Madlock (2021) and Phillips (2006) both achieve in their summaries of Walker's definition is that womanism is rhetorical, communal, political, and social. Moreover, they both recognize the strong ingenuity and agentive power that Black women possess for themselves and the communities they love.

The work of Stacey Floyd-Thomas influences my understanding of womanism. In her anthology, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, Floyd-Thomas (2006) writes that:

Outside the full version of the term, a common understanding of a womanist is that she is a Black woman committed to defying the compounded forces of oppression (namely, racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism) that threaten her self-actualization as well as the survival of her community. (p. 4)

Implicit within this understanding of womanism is the idea that, while womanism begins and is sustained by Black women, it also benefits other people. Indeed, Johnson (2017) notes that "a womanist is a Black woman or woman of color who identifies with feminism and is committed

to the survival and wholeness of all people regardless of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (p. xvii). This complements Floyd-Thomas’s work which expands womanist epistemology beyond definitions of womanist or womanism into definitions of what it means to practice womanism. Thus, while keeping the fundamental parts of Walker’s definition intact, Floyd-Thomas (2006) delineates five tenets of womanism: (a) radical subjectivity, (b) traditional communalism, (c) redemptive self-love, (d) critical engagement, and (e) appropriation and reciprocity. The first four tenets are important to the present analysis as they are salient within Baker-Bell’s address. Together, these womanist tenets reveal a prophetic epistemology that undergirds the anti-racist teaching that Baker-Bell imagines within language and literacy education and can be applied to other disciplines, including communication and rhetorical studies.

### **Womanist Rhetoric**

Black women scholars have been working to center Black womanhood in communication and rhetorical studies for many decades (Davis, 1998; Davis, 2015; Stanback, 1988). Many of the earliest renderings in Black women’s communication studies identified how traditional feminist theories tended to exclude the perspectives of Black women. Davis (1998) argued that the paucity of rhetorical scholarship on African American women’s epistemology and ontology implies that Black women’s discursive and nondiscursive practices are inconsequential to understanding human communication in at least three ways.

First, it implies that Black women’s standpoints are no different from the social realities of white women. Second, in keeping with the status quo of institutionalized racism and sexism, scholars of rhetorical theory and criticism see little efficacy in Black women’s ways of creating meaning. Third, while rhetorical critics provide scholarship on “great

black women speakers," the rhetorical lives of the "everyday" masses of Black women are neglected in [our] journals and anthologies. (p. 78)

These sentiments, and others like them, formed a critical response to the discipline's treatment of Black female experiences and Black women's contributions to communication and rhetorical studies. Houston and Davis (2002) noted the myriad of theoretical perspectives that illumine African American women's communication, particularly those that "acknowledge black women as voices of authority on our own rhetorical history and contemporary communication encounters, marginalized, ignored, or devalued" (p. 3). They argue that these African American feminist and womanist epistemologies are rooted in lived experiences that form the basis for a commitment to the liberation of Black folk and women. Hence, they contend that African American feminist and womanist studies in communication is "scholarship that speaks to the needs not only of African American women, but of all members of African American communities and of the larger human community of which they are a part" (p. 15).

Taylor (2009) argues for womanist rhetoric as a theory that centers on Black women's experiences, narratives, and discourses as valid points of departure for academic work. Within this work, womanist rhetoricians seek out the injustices within and outside the Black community. Indeed, Johnson (2015) argues that if womanist rhetoricians could speak, they might offer a "critique on how to discuss the current race & racism problem in this country, through a womanist lens" (p. 163). Hence, womanist rhetoric emerges within the African American woman's experiences as a cultural discourse. Taylor (2009) notes that as a primary cultural discourse, womanist rhetoric contains three pillars: (a) authentic womanist voice, (b) gendered cultural knowledge, and (c) ethical discourse for salvation. Together these pillars provide the



framework for womanist social agents who “attempt to find humane and equitable solutions for the good of the whole community, rather than simply the good of women” (Taylor, 2009, p. 4).

According to Hamlet (2000), the emergence and development of a womanist epistemology and methodology present African American women and their scholarship as distinct subjects of the human family worthy of acknowledgment and study. Watkins-Dickerson (2023) notes that womanist rhetorical theory “takes seriously the meanings, methods, and musings of Black female rhetors and the relationships they maintain as necessary to their spiritual, social, communal, psychological, and intellectual survival and thriving” (p. 200). This suggests that within womanist rhetoric, there is an imperative to understand the world from the lens of Black women. In doing so, the rhetorical critic acknowledges Black women as experts in their lived experiences, with their truths and manifold wisdom passed down from generation to generation. Hendrix (2021) writes that:

As I reflect on my life, I can see a foundation laid by the black women in my life ... I learned from them without realizing all that I was absorbing. I learned pride, self-love, persistence, and spunk ... And, thus, I learned womanism without even realizing it. This intergenerational wisdom led me to the ivory halls of academia and guided me through its labyrinths. (p. 257)

Such musings contribute to the tapestry of Black women’s communal experiences, which form a framework to navigate social and political worlds that allow Black women to survive *and* thrive. This womanist framework is what April Baker-Bell employs in her address to resist anti-black linguistic racism and to advocate for linguistic justice. That is to say that Baker-Bell engages in womanist rhetoric that “addresses and identifies the marginalized and then [it] produces a rhetoric of resistance that defies those oppressive forces that have assigned people to the fringes

of mainstream society” (Johnson, 2017, p. 117). Baker-Bell (2017) identifies this as Black feminist-womanist storytelling in her own work.

### **Black Feminist-Womanist Storytelling**

One of the attractive features in Baker-Bell’s address is her employment of Black feminist-womanist storytelling—a method rooted within the African American females’ literacy tradition. This framework for storytelling reflects Black women’s multiple consciousnesses and is one of the most powerful languages and literacy practices that Black women possess (Baker-Bell, 2017). Lindsay-Dennis (2015) notes that Black feminist-womanist research is a culturally congruent model to guide studies about African American girls. This research paradigm, she argues, “allows for consideration of intersectionality and metaphysical aspects of African American girls’ cultural perspectives and demonstrates a commitment to social change and community building” (p. 511). Consistent with conceptions of womanism as an intersectional rhetoric, Baker-Bell (2017) argues that “if our feminism should be intersectional, then so should our approach to storying” (p. 532). To this end, Black feminist-womanist storytelling functions as a rhetorical practice that privileges and positions Black women as producers of knowledge, cultural critics, and social change agents.

Through Black feminist-womanist storytelling, the Black female rhetor centers herself, her positionality, and her perspectives in the stories she shares. In doing this, Baker-Bell rhetorically reconstructs the past, present, and future in the legacy of the African *griot*, which symbolizes in the African oral tradition the ethical responsibility one has as a “keeper of the culture.” Davis (1998) notes that being a “sister griot” or a *griotte*, is to “take rhetorical criticism to another level by illuminating the liberatory strategies of Black women in their attempts to transcend the essentialist ideologies that neglect their experiences, lives, and critiques from the

discourse of human communication” (p. 80). Hence, as a Black feminist-womanist storyteller, Baker-Bell invites her audience to the kitchen, the porch, the salon, the pulpit, and all the other real and figurative spaces in which Black women’s discourses are heard, valued, and received to address the problem of anti-black linguistic racism and the solution of anti-racist Black language pedagogy.

While Black feminism-womanism has been documented as a practical methodology, it is important to acknowledge the controversy this hyphenated framework presents in some academic circles, including communication and rhetorical studies. Alice Walker (1980) argues that:

“Womanist” encompasses “feminist” ... An advantage of using “womanist” is that, because it is from my own culture, I needn’t preface it with the word “Black” (an awkward necessity and a problem I have with the word “feminist”), since Blackness is implicit in the term ... (p. 100)

Walker’s comments rhetorically situate the meaning of *womanist* as something culturally different from [Black] feminist. While they are similar, they are not synonymous. Indeed, Watkins-Dickerson (2023) acknowledges that there have been instances inside and outside of academic and activist circles where womanism may have been conflated with Black feminism or feminism in general; however, she contends that “[Black feminism] does take up the needs of Black women and the communities they represent, but womanism is still more nuanced and distinct” (p. 198). Phillips (2006) contends that “feminism is confluent with the expression of womanism, but feminism and womanism cannot be conflated, nor can it be said that womanism is a “version” of feminism” (p. xxi). This critical distinction resonates with my own criticism and hesitation of Baker-Bell’s hyphenation of Black feminism and womanism as a framework for

storytelling. Though not entirely conflated, a Black feminist-womanist lens does not account for where Black feminism and womanism begin and end rhetorically. To this end, I maintain, as Walker (1980) argues, that “womanist” encompasses “feminist”, and that Blackness is implicit therein. In the following analysis, I draw on four of Stacey Floyd-Thomas’s womanist tenets to reveal how Baker-Bell promotes Black linguistic justice through a womanist-prophetic rhetoric.

### **Womanist Tenet #1: She “*Radical*”**

Baker-Bell titles her address “We Been Knowin: Toward an Anti-Racist Language and Literacy Education,” which I argue is her first rhetorical choice as the “we” to whom she refers has an intentional dual meaning. Implicit within the title, Baker-Bell maintains an inclusive-exclusive “we” binary that reverberates throughout her address. She exclaims that:

I titled this talk “We Been Knowin...” to suggest that *we been knowin* what to do to move toward an anti-racist language and literacy education. The real question is what are we waiting on to do the work?

Here, she references an *inclusive* “we” which is typically used “when the individual or group of individuals spoken to are included within the referential area of the pronoun” (David, 2014, p. 168). Baker-Bell uses the inclusive “we” to index language and literacy education educators. By claiming that language and literacy educators *BEEN* knowin, Baker-Bell acknowledges the history of anti-racist teaching and scholarship through which teacher-scholar-activists advocated for Black Language and Black Language-speaking students. Elsewhere, Baker-Bell (2019) notes that through a historical lens

We are able to see that little has changed over the last 85 years regarding the language education of Black students. That it, sociolinguists and language scholars have for

decades described the harm an uncritical language education has on Black students' racial and linguistic identities and called for new approaches. (pp. 1-2)

So, in asserting that *we been knowin*, Baker-Bell renders a rhetorical side eye at her audience to suggest, as we might say in Black vernacular, *I know y'all had heard us!*

On the flip side of the binary in Baker-Bell's title is the notion of an *exclusive* "we." David (2014) notes that rhetorically the exclusive "we" excludes the individual or group of individuals spoken to from its intended referential scope. In her address, Baker-Bell specifically argues:

"We been knowin..." also signifies that communities of color especially Black women, women of color, queer and trans people been knowin what has and has not worked by way of our lived experiences and has continuously taught us how to think about freedom, collective liberation, and have built a foundation for what must be done today.

The exclusive "we" to which Baker-Bell refers is explicitly womanist, for as Floyd-Thomas notes, "womanism is concerned with how theoretical insights and identity politics concerning the life and work of Black women work to facilitate liberationists scholarship and anti-oppressive social praxis" (p. 6). Hence, in asserting that *WE been knowin*, Baker-Bell recognizes the contributions that Black women have made toward anti-racist language pedagogies while simultaneously challenging linguistic hegemony. Davis (1998) notes that:

Toward this vision, a Black woman scholar serves as a keeper of rhetorical culture by revealing the long-standing diversity of ideas, culture, and aesthetics of Black women's intellectual tradition and the way in which Black women have constructed theory and its practice in their daily lives. (p. 81)

By centering herself as a womanist rhetor(ician) and a “keeper of rhetorical culture,” Baker-Bell testifies on behalf of the past, present, and future Black women scholars invested in the language wars across academic disciplines. This leads to discussion of Baker-Bell’s radical subjectivity.

### **Radical Subjectivity**

This bold rhetorical telling embedded in just the first word of Baker-Bell’s title represents just one example of how her address illustrates the womanist tenet Floyd-Thomas (2006) calls *radical subjectivity*. According to Floyd-Thomas (2006), radical subjectivity is the first tenet of womanism and is defined as a:

Process that emerges as Black females in the nascent phase of their identity development come to understand agency as the ability to defy a forced naiveté in an effort to influence the choices made in one’s life and how conscientization incites resistance against marginality. (p. 16).

Radical subjectivity refers to the ways in which women have been able to subvert forced hegemonic identities of a racist-sexist-classist world (Johnson, 2017). As Floyd-Thomas (2006) notes, it is the radicality of affirming self and speaking truth to power in the face of formidable odds. By practicing radical subjectivity, women take back their identity by telling their own subjective truth. Thus, radical subjectivity can be seen as a rhetorical response to the soul-searching inquiry that Cannon (2006) articulates:

What does it mean that academia is so structured that Black women are severely ostracized when we re-member and re-present in our authentic interest? ... What is the role of Womanist intellectuals in institutions of higher learning, where our pedagogical styles and scholarly lexicons are derailed on a daily basis? The point I am arguing is that anecdotal evidence does a lot to reveal the truth as to how oppressed people live with

integrity, especially when we are repeatedly *unheard* but not *unvoiced*, *unseen* but not *invisible*. (p. 21, emphasis mine)

Cannon's (2006) questions imply that a radical subjectivity is rhetorically salient when Black women find and use their voices to defend their truths, their histories, their literacies, and as Baker-Bell describes it, their *knowin*.

bell hooks (2015) locates radical subjectivity in the space within oneself where resistance is remains possible. She argues that the process of becoming a radical subject:

emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined. (p. 15)

Within this radical knowing of self, especially among Black women and women of color, there is an awakening. In my own work, I identify this as the process of becoming unsettled. I argue that by urging women to engage in a radical subjectivity, womanist theorists harmonize with Paulo Freire in promoting an unsettling, liberating faith, that radically transforms how women (and others) understand themselves and their agency. I conclude that "Like radical subjectivity, becoming unsettled is characterized by resistance [to silence] and love [of oneself]" (Smith, 2021, p. 12). Thus, as Johnson (2017) states, this first tenet of womanism promotes an understanding of womanist behavior, that is, to be womanist is "to express 'outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior' and to be 'responsible,' 'in charge,' and 'serious' at the same time" (p. 15). By affirming the collective knowledge of Black women and other women of color, Baker-Bell takes on a radical subjectivity as she exercises her voice to depart from what Cannon (2006) describes as the "masterminds of intellectual imperialism" (p. 27). Through this

radical womanist rhetoric, Baker-Bell constructs a sense of self and identity (including hers and other Black women/women of color) that opposes systems of power and liberates the oppressed.

### ***Being “Womanish”***

Floyd-Thomas (2006) further defines radical subjectivity as “an assertion of the real-lived experiences of one’s rites of passage into *becoming* a Blackwoman” (p. 16). She describes this as *being* “womanish” which is an audacious act of naming and claiming voice, space, and knowledge. This describes how and why Baker-Bell chose the teaching profession. In her address, Baker-Bell recounts the death of Malice Green who was brutally murdered by two police officers in Detroit in 1992. She says:

I can still visualize the angry tears rolling down my father's face as he called the Detroit Police Department at least 10 times to protest and condemn them for their actions. I recall returning to my middle school the next day looking for an opportunity to process Malice Green’s murder, my father's rage, police brutality, and what it meant to be Black in that social and historical context. Not surprising, all of my teachers were silent about this incident as if schools and literacy learning stood on outside of racial violence.

Baker-Bell notes that this history with racial violence and oppression shaped her view of the world and taught her how to speak back to and against racial injustice. She exclaims, “This is what inspired me to *become* a teacher.” I submit that Baker-Bell’s decision to “become” a teacher is a manifestation of the inner work of her *becoming* “womanish.”

In no way do I mean to imply that being a teacher is a woman’s job. On the contrary, I argue that Baker-Bell identifies the classroom as a formidable rhetorical space to advance a womanist agenda of liberatory praxis particularly related to critical Black language awareness. As Charland (1990) contends, critical/cultural theory, including the embodied cultural theory that



Black women possess, can be used to “identify the sites in which rhetorical action is needed, the audiences that await being addressed, and the interests that such rhetorics must confront” (p. 263). By situating herself in the story about Malice Green’s murder, Baker-Bell reveals her own internal struggle with racial violence, injustice, and consciousness which manifests in her *becoming* a young Blackwoman. That is to say that as a girl she likely spoke as girl, understood as a girl, and thought as a girl, but in living and feeling through Malice Green’s murder, she began the journey of *being* “womanish” in search for a critical rhetoric to help her and others understand the world as she had experienced it—as a Black woman. In her address, Baker-Bell notes that when she began her teaching career as a high school English language arts teacher, she wanted to give her students the kind of racial literacies and awareness that she had learned and experienced. She states:

I wanted to enact ... a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance, a way of thinking about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom ... but I did not have the language to name the kind of linguistic and racial violence and inequities they were experiencing, nor did I have the tools to speak back to the anti-blackness that was embedded in the curriculum, my instruction, [and] the school practices and policies.

I believe that the language and tools that Baker-Bell bemoans are prophetic in nature. She reveals that a key component of *being* “womanish,” and consequently in advancing a womanist mission in the classroom is a prophetic rhetoric—a tool that empowers one to resist interlocking systems of domination and to speak truth that influences discourses of power including school curricula, practices, and policies.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, prophetic rhetoric functions as a social criticism because it challenges the leaders, the conventions, and the ritual practices of society (Johnson, 2012). As

such, prophetic rhetoric functions as critical rhetoric that “examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). In the African American variety, prophetic rhetoric is concerned with both the sacred and secular, often merging the two within Black rhetorical moments. Hobson (2012) notes that the secular aims of prophecy focus on reforming or transforming the United States and/or on creating and improving group life in it. When enveloped in a Black prophetic rhetoric, womanism amplifies a pointed, critical discourse that addresses social injustice—a discourse that reflects the real-lived experiences of Black women. Indeed, it is one thing for a Black woman to be a radical subject, but when she has microphone and a message, she is a reckonable force. Simply put, womanism brings the message, but prophetic rhetoric is the mic. *Holla, if ya hear me!*

### **A Woman(ist) on a Mission: On Black Language and the Politics of Race**

Baker-Bell further illustrates her radical subjectivity as she engages her audience in a critique of language and racial socialization in the U.S. For instance, in another story, she shares that:

During my junior year of high school, I remember catching wind of the Oakland Ebonics controversy which created tension with the Black community about the way *we* talk. I recall overhearing my math teacher criticize Black language by referring to it as poor grammar and ignorant. My parents took a different stance on the issue. They were sick and tired of the relentless shaming of Black people—the way we talk, the way we walk, the way we dress, the way we eat, and the way we live. I was personally unbothered by the debate and the demeaning messages about a language that my lived experiences had

already validated. Black language for me has always reflected Black people's ways of knowing, interpreting, surviving, and being in the world.

Again, Baker-Bell situates herself in a story involving a broader social and cultural controversy, and in doing so, reveals how her real-lived experience shapes and gives deeper meaning to that public controversy. Particularly, she acknowledges how the Oakland Ebonics controversy created tensions even within Black communities where some, like her math teacher, dismissed Black Language as ignorant but others, like her parents, recognized it as part of Black culture. I submit that Baker-Bell's radical subjectivity, as a keeper of the culture and a defender of Black languages and literacies, is a product of this controversy that unfolds amidst the conflicting discourses regarding Black Language as a legitimate linguistic system. In other words, her radical subjectivity is only necessary because this controversy exists. Outside of this controversy, there is only Baker-Bell's real-lived experience and her truth that Black Language is Black culture which is validated by her parents.

Baker-Bell's need to address and talk back to the politics of language and race is a rhetorical response sustained in controversy. This gives context to the way Leff (1993) treats rhetoric as a medium that seeks to resolve controversies for practical purposes while sustaining the ongoing process of controversy. In other words, this political, conscious-raising, and prophetic rhetoric that Baker-Bell needs to facilitate her womanist radical subjectivity hinges on the very controversy she resists and aims to resolve. As bell hooks (1990) argues, "Radical black subjectivity can be recognized by others without political resistance *only* in a context where white people and Third world elites are not trying to maintain cultural hegemony, insisting that we be as they want us to be" (p. 21, emphasis mine). Baker-Bell understands this as she deliberately uses terms like "Black Language" and "white mainstream English" not to uphold a

linguistic binary but to highlight the interconnectedness of language, race, anti-black racism, and white supremacy. She argues that these term...

More explicitly capture the intersections between language and race. By linking the racial classifications Black and white to language, I am challenging us to see how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected—that is, people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences. Indeed, the way Black language is devalued in our classrooms reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world.

For Baker-Bell, Black Language, as a descriptor and as a linguistic system, functions as a rhetoric of resistance. Black Language is the vernacular of Baker-Bell's radical subjectivity. It is the phonology and grammatical structure through which she says to her audience, "As literacy researchers and educators, *We BEEN knowin* that linguists maintain that the idea of a standardized language is hypothetical and socially constructed, so why do we continue to let this drive our disciplinary discourses?" Indeed, she asserts that "There is not a legit reason why teachers should be unaware and ill-prepared to address Black language in their classrooms, but here we are. This is why my call for linguistic justice is personal."

Through this radical subjectivity, Baker-Bell takes on the persona of what Johnson (2012) calls a representative prophet—a persona in which "the prophet represents the issues of a particular group" (p. 17). As a radical-representative-womanist prophet, Baker-Bell advocates for linguistic justice which I interpret as a way of politically aligning with the mission of Black liberation movements such as Black Lives Matter, for as she says, "The anti-blackness that is used to diminish Black Language and Black students in classrooms is not separate from the rampant and deliberate anti-black racism and violence inflicted upon Black people in society."

As Baker-Bell addresses her audience, she particularly represents Black students whose linguistic identities are often challenged, marginalized, or ignored in the classroom, but more broadly, she represents all Black folx for whom anti-black linguistic racism is just a microcosm of the racial politics they face in the world. Baker-Bell's call for linguistic justice in the classroom (and in the world) reflects a mission-oriented prophetic rhetoric which Johnson (2012) defines as a "constitutive rhetoric that calls a people to participate in a divine mission by reconstituting the people from their perceived identities" (p. 13). Embedded in her call is a critique of existing language policies, planning, and practices which are rooted in white supremacy and perpetuated through white linguistic hegemony. Hence, Baker-Bell exclaims:

I see linguistic justice ... as a call-to-action [and] a call to radically imagine and create a world free of anti-blackness; a call to create an education system where Black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, and their resistance matters.

By centering the connections between Black Language and the politics of race, Baker-Bell takes on the prophetic mission of challenging her audience to consider the ways in which they are complicit in perpetuating racial violence in the classroom. Likewise, as a radical-representative-womanist-prophet, Baker-Bell also invites the audience to participate in the sacred mission of linguistic justice to end the racial violence sustained in language and literacy education. Indeed, *she be radical; she be representin; she be womanish; and she be prophesyin.*

### **Womanist Tenet #2: She "Communal"**

Baker-Bell's assertion that "We BEEN knowin" not only signals a collective of Black women but also the Black communities to which Black women belong—communities they love

and have nurtured. For Baker-Bell, community is important to understanding and teaching language and literacy. In another story, Baker-Bell recounts the following:

So, I had the privilege of growing up in the D and that's Detroit ... my mother tongue, Black Language, was the dominant language that I heard spoken in my community. I have always marveled at the way Black people in my community would talk that talk. From signifyin to habitual 'Be' to call-and-response, my linguistic community had a way of using language that was powerful, colorful, and unique.

Here, Baker-Bell emphasizes that language is more than a grammatical system but is a social practice that emerges within the speech community. I interpret Baker-Bell's musings as an attempt to move the audience's understanding of Black Language beyond a rule-governed linguistic system and towards a language that forms many communities of practice.

### **Black Language as Community of Practice**

Lave and Wenger (1991) first developed the idea of communities of practice to offer a new theorization of learning, one which was initially aimed at a specialist academic audience in the field of education studies. They note that "The concept of 'community of practice' is left as an intuitive notion..." (p. 42). Later, Wenger (1998) attempted to develop his and Lave's earlier thinking, as the concept of community of practice had been criticized for being undeveloped and unprecise. Wenger (1998) contended that the concept of community of practice is neither a specific, narrowly defined activity or interaction nor a broadly aggregate. He argues that there are a range of indicators that a community of practice has been formed. This range of indicators can be categorized into three dimensions: (a) mutual engagement, (b) a joint enterprise, and (c) a shared repertoire. While Wenger (1998) acknowledged the complexity of communities of practice, he also recognized that they:

They are a force to be reckoned with ... As a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effects on people’s lives. (p. 85)

Communities of practice have since been theorized as collectives of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Defined by ways of doing, ways of talking, beliefs, values, and power relations, these practices emerge during a mutual endeavor (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

Black Language is a speech community that forms many communities of practice. This is an important distinction, for as King (2014) notes, the latter framework does not “presume that a group of people constitutes a community with shared language practices, even if those people call themselves a community” (p. 63). Indeed, Gumperz (1968) described a speech community as “any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs...” (p. 43). While this description does rightly index Black languages across the diaspora, it does not account for specific discursive practices through which Black Language speakers energize, mobilize, strategize, sermonize, and theorize. Understanding how Black Language forms communities of practice sheds light on its many uses and their locale within Black speech communities. For example, people use Black Language in Black preaching, in Black politicizing, in Black music, in Black poetry and spoken word performances, in Black barbershops, in Black hair salons, and Black restaurants. In each of these contexts, Black Language functions differently.

### **Traditional Communalism: From *Girlish* to *Womanish***

By situating Black Language as a speech community of many practices, Baker-Bell rhetorically illustrates the second tenet of womanism known as *traditional communalism*. Floyd-Thomas (2006) defines traditional communalism as:

The affirmation of loving connections and relational bond formed by Black women—including familial, maternal, platonic, religious, sexual, and spiritual ties. Black women’s ability to create, re-member, nurture, protect, sustain, and liberate communities which are marked and measured not by those outside of one’s own community but by the acts of inclusivity, mutuality, and self-care practiced within it. (p. 78)

Through this womanist perspective, Baker-Bell constitutes Black Language as a practice that facilitates mutual bonds among Black women, a connection not limited to a linguistic system but one marked and measured by how the language functions among its speakers—a resource for creating, re-membering, nurturing, protecting, sustaining, and liberating. In this way, Black Language, and its communities of practice, forge a critical literacy within the communal spaces of Black women and their communities.

In her address, Baker-Bell reflects on the community and communalism that Black Language has afforded her when she says:

My mother still remains my favorite linguistic role model. As a young girl, I would try on my mother’s speech styles and conversations with my siblings, friends, or instances where I needed to protect myself and others. This language—this Black Language is the language that nurtured and socialized me to understand the world and how to participate in it.



Here, Baker-Bell works to increase her audience's understanding of Black Language through her communal experience with Black women's language practices. Notably, she highlights her mother's speech styles and how she would "try [them] on" to interact with her friends, but also as a sort of armor used for protection when necessary. I see this figurative practice of "trying on" speech styles as a pedagogic exercise that is reflected in the rhetorical practice of *imitatio*, or imitation—that is, "the rhetorical notion of copying, aping, simulating, emulating models" (Corbett, 1971, p. 243). Imitation has been at the center of much rhetorical controversy. For example, Corbett (1971) notes the abiding suspicion that imitation inhibits writers (or speakers) rather than empowering or liberating them. Terrill (2019), however, notes that for its adherents, imitation enables one's inventional range, "opening up for them new ways of writing and speaking that otherwise might not have occurred to them" (p. 168). I argue that this is the case of Baker-Bell, who strengthens the range of her inventive strategies when she imitates the language styles of her mother. That is to say that in "trying on" her mother's speech styles, Baker-Bell imitates *womanish* behavior. As Walker (1983) articulates in her four-part definition, "to be *womanish* is the opposite of "girlish," or frivolous, irresponsible, not serious. Contextually, *womanish* comes from the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," or like a woman" (p. xii). By copying, simulating, and emulating her mother's style of Black Language, Baker-Bell adopts womanish behavior that defines her emergence from girlhood to womanhood. Black Language, or precisely what Lanehart (2009) calls African American Women's Language, becomes a point of access to a critical way of reading the world and participating as a Black woman.

Inherent in Baker-Bell's story is a prophetic message aimed at the continual reconstitution of her audience. She tells her Black Language story to convey a counternarrative

about Black Language, and in doing so, suggests that to deny Black students their language is to deny them their literacy, a community of practice created within the communal sanctuaries of Black women and their communities. As she states in her address, “Black Language is also the native language and rich linguistic resources that so many Black students bring to classrooms every day ... Yet, in classrooms, Black Language is devalued and viewed as a symbol of linguistic inferiority...” In stressing this anti-black linguistic racism, Baker-Bell demonstrates the first part of the mission-oriented prophecy's rhetorical structure. Johnson (2012) writes that at this stage of the structure, “the prophet typically attacks the premise of the people’s identity” (p. 14). Hence, Baker-Bell weaponizes her warm and humanizing narrative of Black Language to confront cold and dehumanizing language ideologies rooted in racism and white supremacy.

Unlike other types, mission-oriented prophecy maintains a commitment to manifesting the hope and encouragement that prophetic rhetoric promotes. To do this, the speaker must work to (re)constitute the audience’s perceived identity. This is what Baker-Bell does as she challenges here audience to understand how white supremacy contributes to the language politics in education and schooling. More to the point, Baker-Bell’s challenge to the audience is a condition of their (re)constitution as they must participate in the discourse that Baker-Bell presents to them. This is what Charland (1987) calls the rhetoric of interpellation. According to Charland (1987), interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters a rhetorical situation, but an interpellated subject participates in the rhetorical discourse they enter. I submit that by challenging her audience to see language and literacy education through this racial and political lens, Baker-Bell invites them into a mission-oriented rhetorical situation. In keeping with the rhetorical structure of mission-oriented prophecy, however, Baker-Bell must invite “the audience to see and participate in the new identity” (Johnson, 2012, p. 14). To this end, Baker-Bell’s

storytelling functions as a mission-oriented rhetoric of interpellation through which she prophetically invites the audience to enter the discourse of critical Black language awareness and Black linguistic justice and participate in it.

Through her storytelling, Baker-Bell rhetorically invites her audience to experience the kind of communal sanctuary and training ground she experienced through Black Language. As tourists in Baker-Bell's rhetorical musings, the audience can better understand the cultural capital that Black Language possesses in facilitating everyday practices for everyday people in Black communities, even practices to survive. Understanding how Black Language forms communities of practice in which critical literacies are developed informs why Baker-Bell has dedicated her career to advocating for Black Language and anti-racism in her field. As she says, her career as a Language and Literacy researcher began "with questions about how I could produce anti-racist scholarship, praxis, and knowledge that worked for transformation and social change." Hence, by advocating for Black Language and its communities of practice and communal experience, Baker-Bell employs the Black speech styles she learned from her mother and other Black Language speakers. By this, I suggest that Baker-Bell engages a mission-oriented prophetic rhetoric to advance critical Black Language awareness and protect Black Language and Black Language speakers – the kind of protection she learned from "trying on" the Black Language of her mother.

### **Womanist Tenet #3: She "*Be Lovin*"**

To understand the function of the third womanist tenet, I must briefly return to how Black Language forms communities of practice. Baker-Bell takes an important turn in her address, where she talks about how Black Language functions in various demonstrations of digital activism, which she describes as critical race media literacies. In her speech, she states:

The urgent need for an anti-racist language and literacy education became clearer to me following the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. During this time, I was witnessing the ways in which Black people were using these kind of critical race media literacies and digital activism to disrupt the media's role in anti-black racism, racial violence, and the maintenance of white supremacy.

Baker-Bell introduces critical race media literacies as a community of practice that emerges within Black speech communities. Elsewhere, Baker-Bell (2020c) describes this community of practice as anti-racist critical media literacies, “an approach where Black people play a role in highlighting, deconstructing, and addressing patterns of media injustices, and engage in Black digital activism to raise awareness of the crisis of racial injustice” (p. 4). Drawing on these critical race/anti-racist media literacies, Baker-Bell acknowledges how members of the Black speech community use their language to address the stereotypes, misperceptions, overcriminalization, and marginalization of Black folx. Reflecting on this practice, she says:

I [first] noticed this as I was trying to learn more about the circumstances surrounding Trayvon's death. I recall reading mainstream media news stories and social media posts that portrayed Trayvon as a thug, a criminal, a troublemaker who got what he deserved. I was seeing the ways in which the child was being put on trial basically for his own death before I had an opportunity to learn about what actually led to his death.

Here, Baker-Bell does two important things. First, she identifies the rhetorical situation in which she first noticed Black folx's critical race/anti-racist media literacies. Specifically, she points her audience to what she describes as “mainstream” media news stories and social media posts. The intentionality implicit within the descriptor “mainstream” is key as it creates a binary to the “marginalized” media news stories and social media posts that constitute the critical race/anti-

racist media literacies she praises. The second thing Baker-Bell does hinges on the first. In distinguishing between “mainstream” and “marginalized” media outlets, she also highlights how they use language differently to influence narratives or perceptions related to members of racially oppressed communities—in this case, Trayvon Martin.

In reflecting on the mainstream media stories and social media posts she had encountered in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin’s death, Baker-Bell calls attention to how Trayvon Martin was characterized as a thug, a criminal, and a troublemaker. This language illustrates what McGee (1980) calls “ideographs,” which he defines as “an ordinary-language term found in political discourse ... it warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial” (p. 15). Simply put, an ideograph is frequently used in political discourse that uses an abstract concept to develop support for political or ideological positions. Such words are usually ambiguous but are used to give the impression of a clear, socially acceptable meaning. Words such as <thug> or <criminal> are imbued with ideological power and used to sustain controversial assumptions that often lead to racial profiling and discrimination. Baker-Bell describes these as “damaging narratives that were used to project Trayvon and, by extension, other Black boys as dangerous others.” At the same time, Baker-Bell bears witness and testifies to the Black folx who use critical race/anti-racist media literacies to disrupt the media’s role in perpetuating anti-blackness. In particular, she notes having observed how “Black youth and Black activists used antiracist critical media literacies grounded in our communities’ knowledges to counter and rewrite the damaging narratives” (Baker-Bell, 2020c, p. 4).

By emphasizing this community of practice, Baker-Bell not only situates Black Language as a rhetoric of resistance but as a counter-language that allows Black folx to “control their

images, produce counternarratives, express their opinions, voice their concerns, and locate more reliable news and information about the Black community” (Baker-Bell, Jones Stanbrough, & Everett, 2017, p. 137). Given this example, Baker-Bell argues that language and literacy educators need to know about the kinds of critical race/anti-racist media literacies that many Black students bring with them to the classroom because, as she states:

Too often our critical media pedagogy or just literacy in general overlook the critical media literacy practices that youth are already engaging and that speak back to the agents and forces within media that work to stigmatize, characterize, and marginalize them by projecting them as dangerous others.

As she advocates for Black students, Baker-Bell continues to challenge her audience to understand how Black languages, Black literacies, and Black lives are ignored and overlooked in educational institutions and, at the same time, assaulted and disparaged in media institutions. But Baker-Bell notes in her address: “Here's the thing, *we been knowin* about the media's agenda for Black folk. Indeed, our ancestors and elders taught us long ago [that] *the media ain't never loved us.*” Baker-Bell reverts to using the exclusive “we” to assert Black folx’s knowledge and understanding of racial politics. She argues that the critical race media literacy practices observed in Black youth are part of their ancestral memory and knowledge of their predecessors. In recognizing this connection between Black critical media literacies and Black ancestral knowledge, Baker-Bell takes on the third tenet of womanism that Floyd-Thomas describes as *redemptive self-love*.

### **Redemptive Self-Love**

In *Revolutionary Love: Creating a Culturally Inclusive Literacy Classroom*, Boutte (2022) writes, “What’s love got to do with it?” you may ask.” She unequivocally responds with

one word: “EVERYTHING” (p. 10, emphasis mine). Boutte (2022) joins the chorus of revolutionary thinkers and teachers alongside Baker-Bell in promoting love as a pedagogical ethic. Such a love ethic, as bell hooks (2001) describes, “presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well” (p. 87). But as Hamlet (2000) argues, “Before one can genuinely love others, one must first learn to love oneself” (p. 430). Hence, Floyd-Thomas (2006) asserts that *redemptive self-love* is the third tenet of womanism which she defines as:

An assertion of the humanity, customs, and aesthetic values of Black women in contradistinction to the commonly held stereotypes characteristic of white solipsism. The admiration and celebration of the distinctive and identifiable beauty of Black women. “I am *black and beautiful...*” (p. 142)

Johnson (2017) describes redemptive self-love as the ability to unashamedly love self and stand up for self, even against the stereotypes held by those in power. This love reaffirms Black women and empowers them with an unconditional and relentless resolve to enjoy the range of their common sense and the pleasures of their senses. Indeed, redemptive self-love pulls Black women back from the edge when the world tells them they are not enough while simultaneously drawing from the well of Black womanhood to nurture and nourish others. Redemptive self-love is rooted in the acclamation “I’m Black and beautiful,” for as Johnson (2017) notes, the redemptive aspect of this love lifts the shame, dishonor, disgrace, and condemnation that society has placed upon this woman.

In Alice Walker’s four-part definition, she describes a womanist as a woman who “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless” (Walker, 1983, p. xii). A womanist allows love to express itself through all facets of her being. A womanist chooses to love, and as

bell hooks (2001) writes, “Individuals who choose to love can and do alter our lives in ways that honor the primacy of a love ethic” (p. 87). Indeed, commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering different values to live by. In other words, the notion of redemptive self-love is both a model and framework through which womanists demonstrate and teach others how “to resist the social constructs of others by operating out of who they themselves say that they are” (Johnson, 2017, p. 64). Settles (2006) adds to this womanist concept of self-love, arguing that the Yoruba goddess, Osun, “articulates a radical liberationist project to Black women: in loving self at all costs, one is ushered into transformative ways of seeing and being regardless” (p. 198). Settles (2006) contends that Osun’s model of revolutionary love challenges one to be conscious, ethical, and authentic in all spheres of reality. She describes this revolutionary love as:

An oppositional posture that demands both the inward and outward emanation of love that should lead us into greater communion with the world ... Osun clearly illustrates that loving self incites one to fully and deeply love one another, humanity, and life itself. (p. 198)

Redemptive self-love, then, is a practice that works from the inside out. Johnson (2017) describes it as the transformative key toward liberation. That is to say that redemptive self-love emanates from within [Black women], but its effects are transformative and revolutionary.

Simply put, redemptive self-love makes room for revolutionary love.

### **“We Been Knowin... How to Love”: Redemptive Self-Love to Revolutionary Love**

In her address, Baker-Bell asserts that “the media *ain’t* never loved [Black folx],” for historically, the media have been instrumental in reinforcing anti-black racism and maintaining white supremacy. She argues that white supremacists exert control over media images to maintain systems of racial domination. Connecting this to the Black experience, Baker-Bell says:



The Black community have long cultivated a deep and thoroughgoing skepticism regarding traditional news narratives; for example, Malcolm X warned in 1964 that the press is irresponsible; it will make the criminal look like she's the victim and make the victim look like she's the criminal. This reversal was evident in the cases of George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin in 2012, Darren Wilson and Mike Brown in 2014, Brian Encinia and Sandra Bland in 2015.

Here, Baker-Bell argues that in constructing images that promote racial inferiority, the media contribute to a lack of empathy for Black life. Indeed, these dehumanizing portrayals of Black folx in the media are what Baker-Bell describes as “part of a historical lineage that continues to support a white supremacist agenda that leads to anti-blackness.” Hence, Baker-Bell exclaims to her audience that this should serve as a radical wake-up call for language and literacy educators to create space in their disciplinary discourses, curricular choices, and pedagogical practices to model anti-racism and promote empathy that is sensitive to Black suffering and Black humanity. In essence, she calls for a pedagogy of revolutionary love.

Loving blackness—that is, Black languages, Black literacies, Black lives—is the performance of a political stance that is rarely reflected in everyday life. Still, when it is presented, it is often deemed suspect, dangerous, and threatening (hooks, 2001). In her address, Baker-Bell paints an unsettling picture that captures the racial violence exacted on Black folx when she says:

The desensitization of brutal violence and death of Black people such as seeing video clips on social media of those who were murdered in real time like LaQuan McDonald, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castillo become part of the normal order of business.

Here, Baker-Bell invites her audience to bear witness to how Black folx, and thus Black students, are not always met with love in a world that favors whiteness. Hence, I interpret her reflections as a strategy to continue raising her audience's consciousness about the plight of Black folx in the world and its influence on Black languages and literacies. Baker-Bell maintains a love ethic in that she presents her audience with different values through which to engage Black and non-Black students. For Baker-Bell, the rhetoric of a love ethos necessitates a firm grasp or understanding of the hatred that impedes or resists that love ethos. Indeed, *this is the way of the womanist; walk ye in it!* Drawing on a womanist framework, Baker-Bell invites her audience to the sacred waters of redemption to be baptized in self-love, for it is only through the internal work of self-love that the external work of revolutionary love can be done. Through this prophetic rhetoric of interpellation, Baker-Bell calls her audience to a redemptive discourse that exposes the shame, dishonor, disgrace, and condemnation that society has placed on Black languages and literacies. At the same time, Baker-Bell aims to persuade her audience to participate in the redemptive discourse to achieve the kind of self-love that empowers them to resist the racist and oppressive practices in language and literacy education. This is the work of revolutionary love.

Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte (2019) define revolutionary love as “a deep-seated love bounded in action which disrupts social constructions such as anti-blackness and white supremacist patriarchy through the practice of humanizing love” (p. 48). Indeed, revolutionary love helps all students by disrupting messages of racial inferiority, omission, and inaccurate historical representations. As Wynter-Hoyte et al. (2022) write:

Teachers who embrace revolutionary love understand that this disruption is twofold. First, it involves cultivating spaces for Black and Latine children that affirms their

brilliance in an educational system and curriculum has failed them. Second, it involves cultivating spaces so that non-Black and non-Latine children recognize the brilliance of their peers' communities, histories, and heritages. (p. 14)

In this way, revolutionary love functions as what Paulo Freire (1970/2000) refers to as a dialogic method. He writes that “dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound *love* for the world and for people ... *love* is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself...” (p. 89, emphasis mine). Thus, revolutionary love is inherently rhetorical as it invites its participants to critical dialogue.

Borrowing on McKerrow's work, I argue that revolutionary love is a critical rhetoric marked by: (a) a critique of interlocking systems of domination that create and sustain hegemonic ideologies and (b) a critique of freedom in the sense that it is rooted in a perpetual criticism that challenges complacency. Given this, I further argue that revolutionary love is prophetic because those who embrace it believe in taking action for liberation and justice, disrupting white supremacist norms, and changing the world at both micro and macro levels (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2022). Baker-Bell's call for linguistic justice reflects revolutionary love, for as she says, “My call for linguistic justice is personal. I see my work as an opportunity to speak to my 22-year-old self, a young Black teacher who wanted to enact bell hooks's revolutionary pedagogy of resistance.” Inherent in Baker-Bell's call for linguistic justice is a prophetic criticism of “white linguistic hegemony and Anti-Black Linguistic Racism” as well as a prophetic call for “Black Linguistic Consciousness-raising that helps Black students heal and overcome internalized Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, develop agency, take a critical stance, and make political choices” (Baker-Bell, 2020a, p. 34).

Baker-Bell's advocacy for linguistic justice mirrors what Johnson (2012) defines as prophetic rhetoric as linguistic justice offers: (a) a critique, (b) a call, (c) a charge or challenge, and (d) celebration of hope. But in drawing on the womanist framework, Baker-Bell offers something to the composition of prophetic rhetoric implied in its formation but not clearly articulated. The womanist framework offers *love* as a medium of interpellation that rhetorically moves an audience beyond the prophetic critique, call, and charge *into* the celebration of hope. While the first three components are sufficient in inviting an audience to a rhetorical situation that addresses critical issues within a community or society, they do not account for what persuades an audience to participate in the discourse of hope that prophetic rhetoric promotes. What Baker-Bell offers through her address is a womanist approach to prophetic rhetoric that stresses the need for an inward redeeming love that creates the space for a transformative, revolutionary love. Love precedes hope, and while they are interrelated, they perform distinct functions. *Love casts out fear!* Or as bell hooks (2001) describes it, "As we love, fear necessarily leaves" (p. 93), and in the absence of fear, there is the audacity and capacity to hope. Thus, as Johnson (2017) argues, love is the transformative key toward liberation as it pulls one away from the siren call of an unshakable pessimism toward an earthly hope— a hope "rooted in a *love* of freedom ... It revels in a dark joy of freely thinking, acting, and *loving* under severe constraints of unfreedom" (West, 2004, p. 216 emphasis mine). Hence, in addressing the lack of love and empathy for Black students in schools, and Black folx in the world, Baker-Bell implies a need for a revolutionary love in language and literacy education. This must first begin with the inward work of redemptive self-love, but its expected end is a future and a hope.

#### **Womanist Tenet #4: She “Critical”**

Teachers who embrace revolutionary love believe that language is intimately tied to identity; they honor their students by honoring their home languages (Wynter-Hoyte, 2022). However, this is not always the case for Black students whose home languages diverge from the language of school. Too often, educators perceive Black Language as slang, broken English, or incorrect. These perceptions are rooted in the discourse of appropriateness which involves the conceptualization of standardized linguistic practices. Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that notions such as “standard language” or “academic language” and the discourse of appropriateness in which they both are embedded index racialized ideological perceptions that are not rooted in linguistic fact. In other words, insisting that Black Language is only appropriate at home or with friends outside of school is fundamentally racist. *Lemme pass da mic tuh Sistah Baker-Bell* who states in her address:

Indeed, what we consider standard English is mostly accepted as being proper and correct, but if you ask anyone to define or describe it, many would define it using arbitrary ideas that reflect language superiority. Sociolinguists have long argued that so-called standard English reflects and legitimizes white-male-upper-middle-class mainstream ways of speaking English. The concept of whiteness is important in understanding the silent and invisible ways in which white mainstream English serves as the unstated norm in our classrooms...

Here, Baker-Bell reemphasizes the way that language is racialized in schools and how this racialization aims to socialize students into language standardization which hinders linguistic diversity. This is not indicative of revolutionary love. On the contrary, these language practices perpetuate “fake love” which reproduces disloyalty to minoritized students and their home

languages (Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019). Indeed, “fake love” is a continuum that ranges from appropriateness to appropriation. At one extreme, educators love Black Language-speaking students only in a way that sustains linguistic biases and white linguistic norms, and at the other extreme, society loves Black Language only to the extent that they can exploit it financially. Hence, as Baker-Bell (2020a) writes, “Black Language is one of those features of Black culture that white America loves to hate, yet loves to take” (p. 14).

In addressing this “fake love” of Black Language which she describes as Black linguistic appropriation, Baker-Bell reflects on specific examples in which Black Language and literacies are capitalized on. For example, she says:

Some of the recent examples include the 2017 Mtn. Dew commercial that used rappers Fat Joe, Remy Ma, and French Montana song “[I’m] All the Way Up” to promote their product [and] in Party City’s 2018 commercial using rapper DMX’s song “Party Up in Here” to promote their unicorn party theme. Mars, Incorporated also used the Black lexical slang item “cray-cray” to personalize their sneaker rappers in 2015 ... essentially what this says is it is acceptable for black language to be used and capitalized on by non-native black language speakers for marketing and for play, but it is unacceptable for black people to use it as a linguistic resource in classrooms and communities.

Baker-Bell’s juxtaposition of Black Language as cultural capital *and* a culturally appropriated phenomenon serves as a critique of society’s misuse of the language. At the same time, this comparison serves as a challenge to her audience to critically question the relationship between anti-blackness and language. As she writes, “Failing to theorize about language through the lens of race also contributes to us missing opportunities to critique, expand, and improve our theories of language and language pedagogies...” (Baker-Bell, 2020a, p. 16). Alas, Baker-Bell raises

another womanist principle that is essential to the pursuit of linguistic justice—*critical engagement*.

### **Critical Engagement**

The fourth tenet of womanism that Floyd-Thomas (2006) describes is *critical engagement* which she defines as “the epistemological privilege of Black women borne of their totalistic experience with the forces of interlocking systems of oppression and strategic options they devised to undermine them” (p. 208). She contends that this tenet is marked by the unequivocal belief that Black women hold the standard and normative measure for true liberation as they maintain a hermeneutic of suspicion and a “perspectival corrective to those people, ideologies, movements, and institutions that hold a one-dimensional analysis of oppression” (Floyd-Thomas, 2006, p. 208). In other words, critical engagement is the synthesis of what Black women *been knowin* and their ability to weaponize their knowledge to counter oppressive structures. Johnson (2017) describes it as a cultural critique of society’s cultural norms and that “any person using this particular critical lens is apt to analyze, classify, and/or evaluate all aspects of culture” (p. 79). Hence, critical engagement confronts what society sees as normative by asking the critical questions that challenge those norms.

Baker-Bell models this tenet in her address, but first she illustrates that critical engagement is processual. In reflecting on her journey to critical engagement, Baker-Bell tells the following story:

Just like most Black people who lived in the D, the students I worked with communicated in Black Language as their primary language. It was reflected in their speech and in their writing. On the one hand, as a speaker of Black Language myself, I recognized that my students were communicating in a language that was valid and necessary at home, in

school, and on the block, but what I was receiving was pressure from school administrators to get the students to use the language of school.

Here, Baker-Bell calls attention to the power differential in schools which influence teaching and learning. She discursively distances herself from the administrators whom she accuses of pedagogical pressure. In doing this, Baker-Bell signals to her audience that she understands what it means to be pressured into making difficult instructional decisions that challenge personal beliefs and convictions and how “damaging these decisions are on Black students’ language education and racial and linguistic identities” (Baker-Bell, 2020c, p. 8). She continues with her story by acknowledging her lack of preparation to contend with these discursive tensions as she says:

At that time, I did not have the language to name the white linguistic hegemony that was embedded in our disciplinary discourses, pedagogical practices, and theories of language nor did I have the tools to engage my students in critical conversations about what I'm calling anti-black linguistic racism. I can still recall having a conversation with students in my class about code-switching when one of them flat out said “what I look like using standard English; it don't even sound right.”

Baker-Bell laments the unsettling reality that even as a culturally competent, Black Language speaker, she was ill-equipped to address the critical linguistic issues that her students raised in class. Elsewhere, Baker-Bell (2020c) recalls that some of her students questioned the need to communicate in a way that was not reflective of their culture or linguistic backgrounds. Such questions led Baker-Bell (2020c) to more questions such as: “What is the purpose of language education in our current racial and political context?” and “How do we move beyond traditional approaches to language education that do not view students’ racial and linguistic identities as



interconnected” (p. 7). I deduce that these questions lead Baker-Bell on the journey of critical engagement. Likewise, Baker-Bell charges her audience to critically assess their own instructional discourses, for as she says, “literacy educators must shift their pedagogy and practices to support the rich linguistic resources that Black students and other students of color bring with them to classrooms.” In the following section, I focus on one discourse in language education that Baker-Bell challenges her audience to critically engage: *code-switching*.

### **Critically Engaging “Code-switching”**

In her address, Baker-Bell expresses that her work with Black youth helped her see the need for a framework that explicitly names and captures the type of linguistic oppression Black Language speakers experience. Baker-Bell (2020b) calls this *anti-black linguistic racism* which refers to “the linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization that Black Language (BL) speakers endure when using their language in schools and in everyday life” (p. 9). She contends that anti-black linguistic racism includes teachers’ silencing, correcting, and policing students when they communicate in Black Language which perpetuates the belief that there is something inherently wrong with Black Language. Such instructional practices reflect two common approaches in language instruction. The first approach is *eradicationist language pedagogies* in which Black Language is not acknowledged as a language and “gets treated as linguistically, morally, and intellectually inferior” (Baker-Bell, 2020a, p. 28). The second approach is *respectability language pedagogies*—an approach that “seeks to validate, affirm, and respect Black Language by using it as a bridge to teach White Mainstream English” (p. 29). Still, despite their attempt to avoid the damaging deficit approach of eradicationist languages pedagogies, educators who employ the “respectable” approach do not fully accept or celebrate Black Language; rather, they teach Black students to respond to racism by adhering to white

hegemonic standards of what it means to be “respectable” instead of teaching them to challenge, interrogate, and resist anti-black linguistic racism (Baker-Bell, 2020a).

Baker-Bell further critiques the approach of respectability language pedagogies as an articulation of anti-blackness when she says:

This approach perpetuates anti-blackness as it adheres to the politics of respectability, surrenders to whiteness, and does not challenge anti-black linguistic racism. Speaking of respectability language pedagogies, while I'm here, I may as well talk about *code-switching*.

For Baker-Bell, code-switching is rooted in the politics of respectability. Indeed, as Myers (2020) notes, the reflex to code-switch within white-dominated spaces is an outgrowth of Black respectability. bell hooks (2000) describes this as a cultural edification aimed at pleasing the white dominant racial group, and that it is linked to maintaining a hierarchal class system within the Black community that would separate and therefore elevate the “good” or respectable Black people. I imagine this is what gives Baker-Bell pause regarding code-switching as a pedagogical strategy, for as she contends, “any approach that does not interrogate why students of color are required to code-switch and only acknowledges their native tongues as a bridge to learn [white mainstream English] perpetuates linguistic racism and upholds white linguistic and cultural hegemony” (Baker-Bell, 2020b, p. 9). Hence, Baker-Bell takes on the position that code-switching pedagogies must be critically engaged to reveal the role they play in socializing Black Language-speaking students into the arbitrary norm of standardized English. In her address, Baker-Bell continues to demonstrate a mission-oriented prophetic rhetoric as she attacks two specific premises of code-switching pedagogies: (a) code-switching for *success* and (b) code-switching for *survival*.

### *Code-switching for Success*

The first code-switching premise that Baker-Bell critically engages is that code-switching leads to success. In her address, Baker-Bell recounts the following:

I have heard teachers use exceptionalism discourse with Black students by telling them if you code-switch, you can be the next successful or rich Black person. You could be Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Oprah ... do we ever tell white students to code-switch so they can be the next Steve Jobs, Ellen DeGeneres, or Donald Trump? No, we don't do it. This is just downright racist!

In critically analyzing this premise, Baker-Bell first identifies the teacher as the source of the premise, and second, she argues that the premise is rooted in the discourse of exceptionalism. This is important considering the way scholars frame the rhetorical perspective of instructional communication as source (or teacher) driven and persuasion oriented. Houser and Hosek (2018) contend that instructional communication from the rhetorical perspective is more likely to emulate linear forms of communication in which teachers are the source of instructional messages and students are expected to be compliant. Baker-Bell highlights that in the context of language education, teachers too often abuse their rhetorical power to promote discourses of exceptionalism that are rooted in racist ideologies. This is to suggest that instead of engaging students in discourses of linguistic diversity and pluralism, uncritical language educators maintain a linear form of rhetorical discourse that privileges white linguistic hegemony. Thus, as Baker-Bell calls out, code-switching pedagogies are inherently racist as they favor white, dominant ways of speaking that become “the invisible, 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” (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 171).

In another example, Baker-Bell further attacks this relationship between code-switching and the promise of success. She says:

I have also heard teachers promise Black children that code-switching will help them get into college and earn a college degree, and I just have to think about this. So, we're asking students to give up your culture and your language in favor of achieving, at best, a house, a car, and a whole lot of college debt. Why would Black people want to give up parts of their identity and culture for that dull level of success? *Everyone should be questioning this.* My point is that we can't be out here using these mediocre and problematic measures of success that only legitimizes a white status quo, American dream, white-picket-fence way of living that is tethered to the death of Blackness and Black Language.

Through critical engagement, Baker-Bell provides a womanist-prophetic critique in which she challenges the prominent understanding of code-switching as a practice that leads to success based on *mediocre* and *problematic*. Indeed, as she says, EVERYONE should be questioning this!! Through this critical, prophetic engagement, Baker-Bell works to reshape her audience's understanding of how code-switching asks Black Language-speaking students to do more than switch their language, but as she says, "they are being asked to switch their language, their cultural ways of being and knowing, their consciousness, their survival, their community, and their Blackness in favor of a white middle class identity." Hence, while the burden of code-switching befalls Black Language-speaking students, they do not truly benefit from this linguistic and rhetorical practice. I do not mean to suggest that Black Language speakers do not code-switch, for indeed, they do—but when Black Language speakers engage in code-switching practices, it usually is and should be for their purposes and certainly not for the questionable

promise of success that robs them of their cultural and linguistic identity. In this sense, code-switching functions as just another linguistic resource that serves a range of voices which Black Language speakers can take pleasure in using at their own volition (Royster, 1996).

### *Code-switching for Survival*

The second premise of code-switching that Baker-Bell attacks is that code-switching is a strategy for survival. In her address, Baker-Bell exclaims:

It is also important to interrogate code-switching in light of our current racial and political climate. In many classrooms, Black students are encouraged to code-switch as a strategy for survival; however, the students I was working with on a project in Detroit contested this belief. They questioned how code-switching could be a form of survival or self-protection when Black people are being discriminated against and killed based on the color of their skin.

Baker-Bell raises a critical point which complements what Alims (2016) describes as transracialization. Alim (2016) maintains that through transracialization various interpretive frames are placed on an individual “that is, how my body (phenotype, comportment) and language (linguistic resources...) are translated racially. Hence, while a language or linguistic resource can influence the way a person is perceived, racial translation is always in negotiation with a physical signifier (e.g., phenotype, skin color). As Baker-Bell (2017) puts it, Black students understand that while they can switch their language, they cannot switch their skin. In fact, Baker-Bell (2020a) recalls working with Black youth at the time George Zimmerman was on trial for the murder of Trayvon Martin. She states that “The students pointed out how Trayvon used White Mainstream English when he said, “What are you following me for?” and that did not protect him from being murdered” (pp. 30-31). These critiques beg the question of how code-

switching can prevent Black Language speakers from being discriminated against when Black folx are being killed in the streets across America left and right just for being Black (Baker-Bell, 2017). *But wait, she ain't finished!*

Baker-Bell invites her audience even further into her critical engagement of code-switching when she says:

I think about how code-switching or White Mainstream English did not protect Michael Brown who said “I don't have a gun! Stop shooting!” before he was gunned down by a police officer. [I] think about Eric Garner who repeated the words “I cannot breathe” 11 times before he died after he was put in a chokehold by a New York police officer.

Among others, Baker-Bell (2020a) names Renisha McBride who communicated in standardized English “I just need to go home” to Theodore Wafer before he shot and killed her when she knocked on his door after getting into a car accident. Baker-Bell names John Crawford who said “It is not real” to police officers about a BB/pellet air rifle he picked up and was holding in a Walmart store before police officers shot and killed him. Finally, she writes, “I also think about Atatiana Jefferson, Ayanna Stanley Jones, Tamir Rice and countless other Black children and adults who were victims of racial violence before they could utter a word” (p. 31). In my reading of her address, I conclude that naming these individuals and retelling their fatal experiences serves two rhetorical functions. First, Baker-Bell names these experiences to punctuate her counterclaim that code-switching into white mainstream English will not save Black folx and cannot solve racial and linguistic injustice. Second, I contend that by naming these Black victims, Baker-Bell embodies a prophetic form of rhetorical witnessing.

Flynn and Allen (2020) situate rhetorical witnessing as an interdisciplinary field that “does the crucially important work of investigating pain, suffering, loss, trauma, resilience,

testimony and, ultimately, social change and subjective reconstitution” (p. 369). They define traumatic pain and suffering as involving a victim (or victims) and a perpetrator (or perpetrators). A witness may be either a victim or a third party who observes the traumatic event, someone who hears about it secondhand, or a thirdhand observer who sees or hears about it through television, newspapers, or social media. As a concept, rhetorical witnessing highlights that bearing witness entails not only the speaking of something unspoken or unspeakable, but also symbolic production that is *for someone* (Allen, 2021). To bear witness is to reach a community or audience with discourse about what remains unspoken and, in that address, to change them in some way. I submit that through her critical engagement of code-switching, Baker-Bell once again coalesces womanism and prophetic rhetoric through prophetic witnessing—that is, a prophetic call to remembrance for the purpose of critical engagement (criticism), contemplation, and change. As a prophetic witness, Baker-Bell calls her audience to remember Black suffering and pain in a critical way which creates the space for contemplative reflection regarding anti-black violence in and out of the classroom. The end goal, as prophetic rhetoric encourages, is the hope of change.

### **Conclusion: Towards A Womanist Prophetic Rhetoric**

In my analysis, I have aimed to amplify the already potent voice of April Baker-Bell whose womanist storytelling complements prophetic rhetoric. Baker-Bell’s address does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how womanist tenets and prophetic discourses work in tandem with each other, but it does offer a significant point of reference to theorize womanist prophetic rhetoric in the context of teaching and instruction. My conception of this term focuses on the specific rhetorical insight womanist and prophetic discourses offer and how their rhetorical fiber can be synthesized to influence the teaching of language, communication,

rhetoric, and other subjects. Indeed, Allen (2012) has already noted the import of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism regarding womanists as prophetic preachers. As I see it, womanist prophetic rhetoric considers how the womanist, or the womanist framework, strategically employs rhetorical discourses as a form of prophetic teaching.

West (1988) writes that the first national articulation of Black prophetic practices in the U.S. emerged from Black women. He names the likes of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Marie W. Stuart, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper as an organization of Black women who raised their voices in opposition to institutional racism and sexism in the U.S. and in Black communities. Hence, Black women have a long-standing rhetorical history of organizing, strategizing, and sermonizing to address social and political issues. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to how Black women's prophetic practices are reflected in pedagogical rhetoric; and how those practices advance other pedagogical frameworks. Indeed, Johnson (2017) notes that systemic racism influences institutional racism, which continues to perpetuate the silencing of our Black female scholars in academia. She argues that "if womanist rhetoricians could speak, we would create a womanist criticism that ties back to the four tenets of Alice Walker's womanist definition" (p. 162). Johnson (2017) notes that Floyd-Thomas's phrased tenets—radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement—are particularly useful in rhetorical criticism. As I have attempted to illustrate, these tenets provide rhetorical insight into the ways Black women grapple with the notions of agency, affirmation, and action as they strive for social change. Such rhetorical treatment is needed in the study of instructional communication, pedagogical rhetoric, and classroom discourse.

In summary, Baker-Bell's address teaches us that a womanist prophetic rhetoric involves the following:



- A *radical subjectivity* through which the educator develops a critical consciousness and becomes bold and courageous enough to resist oppressive structures for herself and for others.
- A *representative* prophetic persona through which the educator commits to representing a group through a prophetic discourse aimed at social justice and social change.
- A commitment to *communalism* which serves as a source of ancestral knowledge but is also foundational to the womanist prophetic critique as it indexes sacred rhetoric of the community the prophet represents.
- A *love ethic* that emanates from within (self-love) and effects a transformative, revolutionary love that perpetuates criticism and challenges complacency in hopes of continual liberation and justice.
- A *rhetoric of interpellation* as it is at once invitational and constitutive.
- A hermeneutic of suspicion facilitated by *critical engagement* of individual, ideological, and institutional systems of oppression.
- A *witness* or discourse that commits to naming violence, trauma, loss, suffering, and pain that evokes continuous critical, contemplative reflection that leads to change.

These features provide the rhetorical underpinnings for the markings of a womanist prophetic rhetoric. They represent the synthesis of what Black women, women of color, and queer folk *BEEN knowin* and *BEEN doin* to sustain a liberatory praxis in teaching and learning. These features reveal more than the limited, linear mode of rhetoric that instructional communicationists purport. On the contrary, engaging in a womanist prophetic rhetoric moves away from the source-driven rhetorical structure of teaching as it is communal, engaging,

participatory, and reflexive. The promise of this framework is hope and a future as it stresses an abiding self and revolutionary love that honors not just Black women but all of humanity.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Liberating the Literate: Jamila Lyiscott and The Magic of Black Prophetic Fugitivity**

In 2018, Dr. Jamila Lyiscott delivered a TED Talk at The Benjamin School in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, titled “Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color.” Lyiscott, known as a viral TED speaker, spoken word poet, and social justice educator, argues that to honor and legitimize all students, educators must legitimize and honor all their varied forms of written and spoken discourse by practicing what she calls “Liberation Literacies.” In her talk, Lyiscott offers five principles meant to disrupt linguistic violence and oppression in education and schooling. Each of the principles stems from the paradigm of liberation literacies which Lyiscott exclaims is rooted in liberation theology. Petrella (2016) traces the roots of liberation theology to Latin American Catholicism and argues that its goal was twofold: (a) a rereading of Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed and (b) the construction of historical projects—models of political and economic organization that would replace an unjust status quo. This theological approach has strong connections to critical pedagogy. As I have said elsewhere, liberation theology provided Paulo Freire additional discourse to reconstitute the oppressed as utopians—“as prophets and messengers of hope” (Smith, 2021, p. 10). Hence, by framing her principles of liberation literacies through the lens of liberation theology, Lyiscott offers an inherently prophetic pedagogical paradigm.

Known for her unique poetic, lyrical style of speech, Lyiscott’s TED Talk rhetorically situates critical Black language awareness as what James Cone (1986/2020) describes as “an event of liberation taking place in the black community in which blacks recognize that it is incumbent upon them to throw off the chains of white oppression by whatever means they regard as suitable” (Cone, 2020, “Liberation and Black Theology,” para. 5). While Lyiscott advocates

for the linguistic liberation of all students, she is especially vocal and passionate about the languages and literacies of Black students. For this reason, I argue that the paradigm she offers closely aligns with Black liberation theology which has received some attention in rhetorical studies (Anderson, 2020; Johnson, 2010). Anderson (2020) notes that Black liberation theology focuses on injustices against African Americans and seeks to liberate them from different forms of oppression—politically, economically, socially, and religiously. Through a Black liberation theological frame, Lyiscott prophetically advocates for Black languages and seeks to liberate Black Language-speaking students from linguistic oppression.

In this chapter, I argue that Lyiscott takes on a Black fugitive prophetic persona to defend the magical power of Black languages and Black Language speakers in English classrooms. As the title of her talk suggests, Lyiscott is concerned with how students of color, especially Black students, are silenced. However, the root of this problem indexes systemic racism perpetuated through instructional policy and practice. Through the lens of [Black] liberation theology, Lyiscott's call for Liberation Literacies projects a pedagogical framework that reimagines critical Black language awareness as a discourse of liberation and fugitivity. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to theorize the *Black fugitive prophet* as a prophetic persona developed to address anti-black linguistic racism in education and schooling. To do this, I offer the following analysis of Lyiscott's 2018 TED talk in which I grapple with three critical discourses: (a) [Black] liberation theology, (b) Black fugitivity, and (c) Black prophetic rhetoric. Drawing on these intersecting discourses, I lay the groundwork for a pedagogical framework to understand the risks of promoting a critical race pedagogy—a framework that highlights the critical, liberatory educator's rhetorical agency in the fight for racial justice and education equity.

## From Liberation Theology Comes Liberation Literacies

According to Boff (1987), liberation theology in Latin America was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor. In this context, Boff argues, “poor” does not mean “the poor individual who knocks on the door asking for alms. We mean a *collective poor...*” (p. 3, emphasis mine). Indeed, this collective mass of the socially and historically oppressed makes up the poor as a social phenomenon. As Tombs (2002) writes, liberation theology set out to transform the lives of the poor, but in the process, the poor transformed what would become liberation theology. Petrella (2016) notes that liberation theology’s foundational texts, those of its inception and expansion, including a shared set of presuppositions, including:

- (a) a sharp dichotomy between revolution and reformist political action, the first seen as necessary while the second is deemed as ineffectual or as an ideological smokescreen that supports the status quo; (b) *the poor were seen as the primary, and at times exclusive, agents of social change*; (c) a sharp dichotomy between socialism and capitalism, socialism as the social system that could remedy the injustice of the latter; and (d) priority was given to politics in the narrow sense of struggle over state power, with little attention to issues of gender, ecology, race and popular culture. (p. 1, emphasis mine)

Many of the pioneers of liberation theology shared this same orientation. The idea of doing theology is a compelling reminder that theological thinking can never be separated from practice and action. This was the methodological foundation on which liberation theology was built; hence, as Gutiérrez (1990) writes, a “theology of liberation means establishing the relationship that exists between human emancipation—in the social, political and economic orders—and the kingdom of God” (p. 62).

Tombs (2002) notes that the language of liberation offered the best insight into the process of salvation. Gutiérrez (1988) distinguished salvation and political liberation but argued for an essential interrelationship between the two. He equated salvation with liberation, but it was not just political liberation he had in mind but a broader sense of integral liberation on three distinct levels (Tombs, 2002). First, Gutiérrez (1988) identified liberation from economic exploitation. Second, he identified liberation from fatalism, which Tombs (2002) argues would allow a people to take control of their own destiny. Finally, Gutiérrez (1988) identified a liberation from sin, which permitted communion with God. Understanding liberation through this lens, one better understands how liberation theology is action-oriented—that is, liberation theology as a “doing” theology. Indeed, as Boff (1987) questions, “What is the action that will effectively enable the oppressed to move out of their inhuman situation” (p. 4)? Boff later argues that:

In liberation, the oppressed come together, come to understand their situation through the process of conscientization, discover the causes of their oppression, organize themselves into movement, and act in a coordinated fashion. First, they claim everything that the existing system can give: better wages, working conditions, health care, education, housing, and so forth; then they work toward the transformation of present society in the direction of a new society characterized by widespread participation, a better and more just balance among social classes and more worthy ways of life.

This conception of liberation emphasizes the agency of the oppressed and those who collaborate with them. As Gutiérrez (1988) writes, poverty can mean a commitment to the poor in solidarity. In any case, the underlying “liberation” in liberation theology is a prophetic commitment to the

life, cause, and struggle of the millions of debased and marginalized human beings, a commitment to ending historical-social inequities (Boff, 1987).

Liberation theology's commitment to action and social transformation is an ideal launching pad for what Lyiscott (2017) calls liberation literacies. Indeed, as she states in her address:

When I say liberation literacies, the term *liberation* in this framework is actually rooted in liberation theology. Liberation theology argues for the interpretation of scripture from the perspective of the oppressed – understanding that the central figure of scripture was actually someone who was poor and marginalized. And it reimagines the way that we can interpret the world if we understand the power that happens in the margins.

For Lyiscott, liberation theology provides a lens through which to examine the world from the perspective of those living on the margins. Notably, she concerns herself with racially marginalized students who often live with the internalized understanding that their experiences are invisible and of little value to the classroom (Ramdeholl & Jones, 2018). In modeling her framework of liberation literacies after liberation theology, Lyiscott punctuates what Giroux (1987) describes as a “new discourse in which the notion of literacy brings with it a critical attentiveness to the web of relations in which meaning is produced both as a historical construction and as part of a wider set of pedagogical practices” (p. 16). Simply put, a liberation literacies pedagogy calls necessary attention to sociohistorical and sociocultural phenomena that need rhetorical intervention. Indeed, as Charland (1987) contends, critical/cultural theory can “identify the sites in which rhetorical action is needed, the audiences that await being addressed, and the interests that such rhetorics must confront” (p. 263). Hence, what Lyiscott offers as a

liberatory framework constitutes a critical rhetoric that responds to the linguistic oppression students of color too often experienced in the classroom.

Elsewhere, Lyiscott (2017) describes liberation literacies with the view that every literacy practice is a unique container of culture, history, and identity. In this sense, liberation literacies rest on the conviction that every literacy practice possesses a unique capacity to open new worlds for both teachers and students. Thus, educators who resist literacies that emerge from racially marginalized communities, whether consciously or not, adopt a rhetorical position that sustains the status quo in the name of linguistic hegemony in education and schooling. I argue that such instructional discourses are the impetus for Lyiscott's TED talk. For example, she begins her address with these questions:

What if I told you that the way that you use language every day had the power to either uphold or disrupt social injustices? What if I told you that, because language is saturated with history and culture and memory, the way that it is policed within our classrooms and our communities is deeply connected to racism and colonialism?

Lyiscott poses these rhetorical questions to invite her audience to a critical conversation centered on the cultural politics of language and literacy. Indeed, as a form of cultural politics, literacy both illuminates and interrogates school life as a place characterized by a plurality of conflicting languages and struggles, a site where dominant and subordinate cultures collide and where teachers, students, and administrators often differ as to how school experiences and practices are to be defined and understood (Giroux, 1987). In her address, Lyiscott aims to draw her audience's attention to how language is seen as a means of pedagogic power which has the potential to liberate and oppress. At the same time, she attempts to raise the consciousness of her audience to understand the political and ideological interests at work in the pedagogical



encounters between teachers and students. In other words, as Black (1992) describes, she makes a “declarative assertion clad in interrogative disguise” (p. 2) to dispel the myth of political neutrality in education and to emphasize how instructional choices always serve political and ideological interests, even when unbeknown to the practitioner.

At the start, Lyiscott acknowledges the connection between language, history, culture, and memory, suggesting that language and literacy do not exist apart from a student’s collective identity. This is especially true in Black and African cultures, for as Delpit (2002) contends, our home language is viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself. Hence, as Lyiscott (2017) writes, “a Liberation Literacies pedagogy asserts that we center ... Black cultures, histories, and identities” (p. 52). Giroux (1987) contends that, in the context of critical literacy, history is a means of recognizing the figural traces of untapped potentialities and sources of suffering that constitute one’s past. On the one hand, I agree with Giroux that critical literacy should be situated within the historical context of the student to unleash their enriching cultural possibilities.

On the other hand, I challenge his narrow conception of cultural memory and history, which appears limited to struggle and suffering. Don’t the oppressed experience moments or times of joy? *Lemme put it another way.* Black joy is just as real as Black suffering, and both contribute to the legacy of language and literacy in Black cultures. Therefore, by promoting a pedagogy of liberation literacies, I contend that Lyiscott signals both the joy of Black cultural expression and the struggle Black folx have endured to legitimize their ways of being and speaking. For this reason, I argue that while Lyiscott’s call for a liberation literacies pedagogy does align with the framework of [Latin American] liberation theology, it aligns more closely with the radical project of Black Liberation Theology.

### ***Black Liberation Theology: A Passionate Language for Liberation Literacies***

In *Black Theology: Essays on Global Perspectives*, Hopkins (2017) traces the global histories of Black theology throughout the diaspora. Regarding what he calls U.S. Black Liberation Theology, Hopkins (2017) notes that James H. Cone is “generally cited, nationally and internationally, as the father of contemporary black theology of liberation” (p. 17). For sure, Cone’s debut book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, was the first book published on Black liberation theology. Using the lens of the Black experience, Cone (1969/2018) argues that the core message of the Bible that Jesus expressed was the liberation of the poor. Indeed, Cone (1969/2018), writes:

Black Theology is primarily a theology *of* and *for* black people who share the common belief that racism will be destroyed only when black people decide to say in word and deed to the white racist: “We ain't gonna stand any more of this.” (p. 78)

In his memoir, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, Cone (2018) notes that he wrote his first book as an attack on racism in white churches and an attack on self-loathing in Black churches. He clarifies that his intentions with the book were to issue “a manifesto *against* whiteness and *for* blackness in an effort to liberate Christians from white supremacy” (p. 61). Hence, Cone’s journey towards a Black Liberation Theology begins with questions centered on Black suffering and Black resistance within the context of the Christian faith and the institution of the church. For Lyiscott, Black suffering and resistance transcends the church institution and can be seen in education institutions as well, particularly regarding Black language and literacy practices. In her address, Lyiscott recounts the following story:

When I was 19 years old, I sat on a panel for a room full of high school students, and a woman in the room stopped me in the middle of speaking, and she said *I'm sorry to stop*

*you but I just want you to know that you are so articulate.* And in that moment, she meant it as a compliment ... [but] I was offended.

Lyiscott identifies an experience that Black people have encountered for many years – an experience rooted in the politics of language and race. Alim and Smitherman (2012) provide a metalinguistic analysis of Barack Obama’s language where they describe this racialized history of the word *articulate*. This history begins with then-Senator Joe Biden, who, in 2007, described Obama as the “first mainstream African American who is *articulate* and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy” (Gregory, 2007). Alim and Smitherman (2012) note that the word *articulate* shows how one person’s seemingly harmless compliment can be another’s glaringly offensive insult. The implication is that most Black people do not have the capacity to engage in articulate speech when white people are automatically assumed to be articulate (Michael E. Dyson cited in Clemetson, 2007, para. 15). Is there any wonder why Lyiscott, or any other Black person, might take offense to such a backhanded compliment. As Lyiscott continues with her story, she contends:

But there's another reason why I was offended. I imagined if this woman heard me speaking with my family (who's Trinidadian) in Caribbean Creolized English, would she have determined something else about my intellectual capacity? or if she heard me speaking with my friends in Crown Heights Brooklyn in African American English, would she have determined something different about my worth? And in that moment, I understood that the answer was yes. And that deeply disturbed me.

Here, Lyiscott seems to take on the rhetorical persona of her teenage self to emphasize the extent to which linguicism has impacted Black students’ experiences in schools – from her past as student to her present as professor. Having perceived the offensive comment to be racially

motivated, Lyiscott works to expose the racist language ideology too often masked under the guise of “articulation.” Such ideologies influence language planning, practices, and policies in education and cause Black-Language-speaking students to feel a sense of devaluation and cultural offense in the classroom.

Imposing what scholars have called monoglossic language ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Garcia & Torres, 2009) on Black Language speakers dismisses the fluid linguistic resources they possess. For decades, rhetoricians have worked to address this anti-black linguistic racism and to advocate for Black modes of rhetorical expression with particular emphasis on how Black languages comprise a plurality of voices. Royster (1996) recounts a similar experience to what Lyiscott encountered only, in her case, she is “complimented” for having used her “authentic voice.” In response, Royster (1996) recalls saying: “Yes, I do have a range of voices, and I take quite a bit of pleasure actually in being able to use any of them at will” (p. 37). Contesting the notion of a singular linguistic form for Black folx, Royster claims all her voices as her own authentic voices, even when it is difficult for others to imagine her having the capacity to do so. In his book *Voices of the Self*, Gilyard (1991) grapples with the tensions of his multiple voices from birth through high school. His experience leads to a career of advocating for the kind of language instruction that honors African American voices in rhetorical studies and pedagogy. Campbell (2005) argues that limiting oneself to a homogenized, so-called American voice, as some would have it, would be tantamount to self-negation or self-hatred. Here, Campbell (2005) echoes Geneva Smitherman’s concept of linguistic push-pull which speaks to Black folx’s love of Black talk while at the same time encouraged to hate it. Indeed, this is a complexity inherent in the politics of racial becoming, for as Maraj (2020)

describes it, Blackness is marked by fluid, polysemic multiplicities in its everyday struggles with/in white spaces.

The polysemic multiplicities which Maraj (2020) describes are very much reflected in the literacies Black students bring with them to the classroom. Yet, the full range of Black students' linguistic repertoires is not always welcome in classroom spaces. Consider what Lyiscott says here:

You see, what I know of myself is that the multiple literacies that I bring to the table—my composite linguistic identity—gives me power, but when I enter into institutional spaces—into classroom spaces—that power is not valued and often stripped away. In these spaces that claim to celebrate diversity, that claim to want to celebrate diverse culture, what instead happens is a perpetual invitation to engage in cultural erasure.

Lyiscott takes on the problem with diversity discourses in education institutions that espouse diverse cultures in word only but not in deed. In other words, as my peoples like to say, *dem folx just payin' lip service!* Prophetically, Lyiscott bears witness to the eradicationist practices and pedagogies at the center of the so-called celebrations for diversity. Regarding language education, Baker-Bell (2020b) describes such eradicationist pedagogies as an effort to eradicate Black Language from Black students' linguistic repertoires. She argues that within this model of teaching, Black languages and literacies are viewed as deficient and the goal is to correct the deficiency and replace it with what is believed to be the better language. This perpetual linguicide—language death—or cultural erasure that Lyiscott calls out is antithetical to culturally sustaining pedagogy which “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive transformation” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). Rooted in culturally sustaining pedagogy, Lyiscott's framework of Liberation Literacies aims to

move educators away from the lip service of diversity discourses toward a critical reimagining and transformative action. To better understand this undertaking, it is important to return to Black Liberation Theology which emphasizes the language of liberation in response to the conditions of oppression among Black people.

Cone (1970/2020) describes Black theology as “a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America ... It believes that the liberation of the black community is God's liberation” (p. 20). His conception of theology is guided by three activities which I believe also resonate in Lyiscott’s argument for a Liberation Literacies pedagogy. These activities include: (a) the exodus, (b) social justice, and (c) liberation.

### **The Exodus**

The first activity is revealed in the *exodus* which, for Cone, marks the beginning of God’s covenant with Israel – and, by extension, God’s covenant with Black folx as a marginalized, oppressed community. Cone (1970/2020) writes that at the exodus, “Yahweh appears as the God of oppressed Israel in its liberation from the Egyptians” (p. 74). The covenant at Sinai is the agreement between God and the people in which God agrees to continue a liberative presence if the people agree to define their existence as a community based on divine liberation. The exodus signifies a move away from oppressive systems in pursuit of a life marked by justice and liberation. This activity has significant implications for Black liberation movements.

In analyzing Martin Luther King Jr.’s protest rhetoric, Selby (2001) identifies an articulation of the exodus narrative to King’s racial justice campaign. In his sermon, “The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore,” King uses the exodus narrative to draw parallels between the experience of the Israelites and the experience of Black Americans. Selby (2001) notes that this

narrative provided King's audience with the sense of collective identity. He argues that "In the symbolic world of King's discourse, however, his hearers were the united people of God, long oppressed by Egypt, but now set free from their long night of captivity by God's mighty hand" (p. 85). Hence, what Selby (2001) reveals is how Black folx see themselves reflected in the narrative of the exodus, and they see, as Cone (1970/2020) puts it, God revealed as "the God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage" (p. 18).

Though Lyiscott does not draw on the narrative of the exodus specifically, her address does index rhetorical elements of the exodus narrative, particularly in her push for a paradigmatic shift in language and literacy education. In her address, Lyiscott states:

So when I talk about liberation literacies, really what I'm talking about is a set of principles ... So there are five principles– and I call these paradigm principles ... and I say they're paradigm principles because they are principles that are centered on and governed by a paradigm shift ... what I'm saying is that once we reconstruct and understand that institutional spaces must reimagine themselves to truly understand, integrate, and accept the diversity that exists in our world we need new paradigms in order to enact that.

Lyiscott argues for a shift away from the old regime, the old system of teaching that dismisses or devalues Black ways of speaking, to embrace a culturally sustaining pedagogy that values Black lives. Elsewhere, Lyiscott (2022) writes that for the field of education, "attention to spirit-murder and the two-ness imposed on souls of Black folks is an acknowledgment of the education system's complicity in perpetuating harm against Black lives" (p. 12). She argues that these kinds of harm necessitate critical pedagogies so that we are held accountable for how education and schooling enact Black suffering. Thus, for Lyiscott, a Liberation Literacies pedagogy must

begin with an exodus—a paradigm shift from pedagogies of oppression to pedagogies of liberation.

### **Social Justice**

The second activity on which Black Liberation Theology is founded is social justice. Mirroring the Black experience after the history of oppression among the Hebrew people, Cone (1970/2020) writes:

The rise of Old Testament prophecy is due primarily to the lack of justice within that community. The prophets of Israel are prophets of social justice, reminding the people that Yahweh is the author of justice. It is important to note in this connection that the righteousness of God is not an abstract quality in the being of God, as with Greek philosophy. It is rather God's active involvement in history, making right what human beings have made wrong. The consistent theme in Israelite prophecy is Yahweh's concern for the lack of social, economic, and political justice for those who are poor and unwanted in society.

There is much to extrapolate from Cone's words. Of particular interest to my present analysis is the way he describes God as the author of social justice and prophets as carriers and, dare I say, couriers of social justice. *That'll preach right dey!* This framing of God and the prophets have profound rhetorical implications as it renders social justice as a sacred discourse intimately connected to the experiences of an oppressed people. This is what Johnson (2012) defines as prophetic rhetoric—a discourse that is “grounded in the sacred and rooted in a community experience” (p. 270). Johnson (2012) argues that prophetic rhetoric offers a critique of existing communities and traditions by charging and challenging society to live up to the ideals espoused while offering celebration and hope for a brighter future. This rhetorical framing situates justice



as a divine intervention through which God actively works to remedy the conditions of the oppressed. But Cone suggests much more. For him, God authors justice, but the prophet must propagate the justice message. As Johnson (2010) notes, in prophetic rhetoric, the speaker speaks the *already known* – that is, what has already been God-authored. Indeed, it is “a process of consciousness-raising because once it is out in the open, the prophetic desire is for the audience to reflect on the situation and change its ways” (p. 276). Hence, Black Liberation Theology sustains within it the prophetic discourse of social justice, which informs Lyiscott’s pedagogy of Liberation Literacies.

In delineating her pedagogy of Liberation Literacies, Lyiscott offers five principles. Each principle begins with the letter “A” for as she says: *They’re all As because imma poet and I like rhythm. I like, you know, I like alliteration; it’s just who I am, right?* Given this, the first principle she describes is awareness. Lyiscott breaks it down this way:

The first “A” speaks to *awareness*. The first “A” says ‘who am I?’ If we are thinking about nurturing youth voice [and] creating space for youth voice in our classrooms in new and in powerful ways that disrupt the historical-racist-colonial perceptions that we’ve upheld for too long, it has to begin with critical awareness.

Here, Lyiscott seems to take on a prophetic persona to render a justice-oriented message, one that disrupts the classroom space through critical awareness. Lyiscott models and calls for the kind of consciousness-raising that Johnson (2010) describes in Black prophetic rhetoric. That is to say that a Liberation Literacies pedagogy begins with a critical consciousness that unsettles oppressive perceptions that educators and students sustain through classroom discourses. Particularly, Lyiscott is interested in the kind of consciousness-raising that leads to Black linguistic justice. As she states:

And it's not just a random awareness but an awareness of the social identities that we each navigate including the language practices that we bring to the table so that I get to say, well actually I speak African American English; I speak Caribbean creolized English; there are multiple ways that I understand and articulate and name the world around me, right?

I find it interesting and informative the way Lyiscott identifies with multiple linguistic audiences to punctuate the extent to which they all are subject to linguistic injustice in the classroom. In promoting the principle of critical awareness, Lyiscott prophetically challenges her audience to become what Greene (2019) calls “work woke” educators who are not only critically conscious but are also committed to changing or, as Lyiscott puts it, disrupting systems and discourses of injustice in education and schooling. The “work woke” educator actively works to “decolonize their own teaching and learning” (p. 105) to liberate students, especially Black students, from the injustices they too often face in the classroom. Hence, a Liberation Literacies pedagogy constitutes a pedagogical rhetoric that produces a liberated subject who is free to engage in Black linguistic practices in the classroom without fear of language policing, linguistic oppression, and other forms of anti-black linguistic racism. Through critical awareness, social, economic, justice, political, and LINGUISTIC justice becomes a sacred discourse that prophetic educators are committed to spreading and defending.

## **Liberation**

The third activity which James Cone uses to conceptualize Black Liberation Theology is liberation. For Cone, the theme of liberation is reaffirmed in the person of Jesus. Cone (1970/2020) notes that the conflict with Satan and the powers of this world, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor, and the locating of his ministry

among the poor are all features of the career of Jesus prove that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation. Cone argues that, in view of the biblical emphasis on liberation, it is important to understand that the task of theology is to explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity. He writes that:

Those who labor under enslaving powers will see that the forces of liberation are the very activity of God. Christian theology is never just a rational study of the being of God.

Rather it is a study of God's liberating activity in the world, God's activity in behalf of the oppressed. (p. 18)

Given this, Cone contends that Black theology becomes an analytic tool through which Black folx can see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of Black oppression.

Black Liberation Theology informs Lyiscott's formation of Liberation Literacies pedagogy. Through the lens of Black Liberation Theology, it becomes clear that liberation is a fundamental human right of the Black oppressed. Whether one believes in a god, a higher power, the universe, or none of the above, what Black Liberation Theology offers is a radical emphasis on liberation as a humanizing activity. Indeed, as Cone (1970/2020) states, the role of Black theology is to encourage Black folx to focus on their own self-determination as a community by preparing to do anything the community believes necessary for its existence. This requires a radical revolutionary confrontation with the structures of white power which begins with affirming the essence of Black lives, cultures, and histories. Elsewhere, Lyiscott (2022) writes that:

[Black Liberation Theology] shows us that when stripped away from its whiteness, the Bible in its original context is not at all a "white man's religion" but finds its roots in

North Africa and the Middle East. And I am left to sit with the complicity of schooling in forwarding a “white man’s history,” which explicitly does not teach or acknowledge the historical contributions of racially diverse groups. (p. 18)

Lyiscott uses the lens of Black Liberation Theology to challenge the ways in which whiteness too often becomes an unquestioned standard for various practices in society. If Black Liberation Theology can be used to debunk the myth of a “white man’s religion,” then the same analytic tool can be used as a means of liberation from the narrative of a “white man’s history.” I find this logic to be an important development in the formation of Lyiscott’s argument for a Liberation Literacies pedagogy, especially in light of her second principle of Liberation Literacies.

The second principle Lyiscott describes is reflected in two ideas: *agency* and *access*. Hinging on the awareness principle, this hyphenation of agency and access speaks to the power that teachers and students possess through their use of language as well as the reach of that power. Lyiscott says:

I work with a lot of young people who engage in African American English practices but have no idea that it has value, because they've been taught that it's wrong, that it's bad, that it's delinquent, that it's deficient—once you go through that awareness process and you become aware that my language has power ... Because of the way that I speak, because of the tools that I bring to the table with my linguistic repertoire, there are spaces that I can access in the world. It's agency that I can have.

Lyiscott likens this sense of agency and access to Barack Obama’s ability to access and bond with different communities because he could speak in diverse ways. Alim and Smitherman (2012) note that in the American context, Obama learned to style-switch, which became “one of his most compelling and remarkable linguistic abilities...” (p. 5). In much the same way that

many bilingual or bicultural people code-switch, many engage in style-switching which Alim and Smitherman (2012) define as the ability to “move in and out of linguistic styles—between varieties of the same language (Puerto Rican English and White Mainstream English, for example” (p. 5). The idea behind this thinking is that one’s multilinguistic ability gives them access to different worlds. While I agree that linguistic pluralism does provide access to different worlds, the idea of code-switching and style-switching gives me pause as they suggest that such access can only be granted when one moves in and out of linguistic codes and styles but not when those codes or styles are joined together. *Dis might be da place tuh remind da reada dat I is tew tied of code-switchin’*. Consequently, I do not read Lyiscott’s comments as promoting code-switching or style-switching, despite how these have been used to describe Obama’s language use. Instead, I interpret Lyiscott as fostering a pedagogy marked by code-meshing.

According to Young (2009), code-meshing “allows black people to play both the black and white keys on the piano at the very same time, creating beautiful linguistic performances...” (p. 60). Young (2010) has also described code-meshing as the ability to blend dialects, internal languages, local idioms, chat room lingo, and the rhetorical styles of various ethnic and cultural groups in both formal and informal speech acts. Lyiscott hints at this linguistic practice when she references Black Language-speaking students and the *tools that [they] bring to the table with [their] linguistic repertoire*. This rhetorical identification situates Lyiscott’s argument specifically within Black speech communities. The very notion of linguistic repertoire signals the full range of Black students’ linguistic abilities that transcends deterministic approaches to language practice and encourages contemporary approaches that see language as “dynamic and fluid ... a continuum, or distinct, depending on how young people and their communities live race/ethnicity, language, and culture” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 8). By acknowledging their

cultural power, a Liberation Literacies pedagogy empowers Black students to recognize their rhetorical agency which informs their linguistic choices and the myriad access those choices yield. This is to say that a Liberating Literacies pedagogy involves liberating the minds of the already literate Black subject, for as Asante (2003) argues, “There can be no freedom until there is a freedom of the mind. The first rule for the freedom of the mind is the freedom of language” (p. 41).

In arguing for the manifestation of agency in Black Language-speaking students, Lyiscott argues for a liberatory pedagogy that disrupts linguistic, literate, and cultural hegemonies that permeate education institutions. Such a pedagogy draws on the essence of Black Liberation Theology which Cone (1970/2020) argues is a survival theology – “it must speak with a passion consistent with the depths of the wounds of the oppressed” (p. 26). Indeed, Cone contends that Black theological language is passionate language, the language of commitment, because it is language which seeks to vindicate the afflicted and condemn the enforcers of evil. But to write a Black Liberation Theology for the Black Freedom Movement, Cone (2018) says that “I had to liberate myself from what I’d learned...” (p. 62). Hence, he writes:

Black liberation theology came out of black culture and religion, and it celebrated a new freedom to talk about God and Jesus in a jazz mode, a blues style, and with the sound of the spirituals. That was where its mojo came from—its magic. I was more concerned about remaining true to black magic ... I wanted to wake up black people and let them know that the day of the white Christ was over. A new Black Messiah was in town. (p. 64)

Though not a rhetorician per se, Cone seems to stumble across an interesting and informative rhetorical phenomenon—Black magic. Much has been written about Black magic in the sense of

cultural empowerment, but the concept has been undertheorized in race and rhetoric studies. I believe Lyiscott's talk embraces the rhetorical artform of Black magic. In rooting her conception of liberation in Cone's Black Liberation Theology, I argue that Lyiscott develops a pedagogical framework that is marked by the same passionate language of Black Liberation Theology. A Liberation Literacies pedagogy is an instructional discourse that remains true to Black magic—that is, the magical discourse that functions to build, generate, produce, and create movements of liberation. This is the power of *Nommo*, for as Asante (2003) writes, "When the oppressor seeks to use language for the manipulation of our reality; *Nommo*, for ourselves, and of ourselves, must continue the correct path of critical analysis" (p. 42).

### **Nommo Literate: The Power of Black Magic(al) Rhetoric**

Asante (2003) asserts that African people have shown a remarkable ability to humanize any language they have spoken. He suggests that it is in the souls of Black folk to seize and redirect language toward liberating ideas and thought. Furthermore, he writes, "African-Americans are an historic people. We have met the challenges of an alien culture, a racist mentality, and an exploitative enterprise with our African ability to transform reality with words and actions" (p. 42). This ability to change realities with "words" reflects the essence of the African concept *Nommo* which has been defined as the generative and productive power of the spoken word (Asante, 1998; Gilyard, 2007; Lanehart, 2015). But there is much more to understand about *Nommo* within the African worldview.

Alkebulan (2005) traces the African concept of *Nommo* to the Dogon people of Mali in West Africa. For the Dogon people, *Nommo*, the power of the spoken word, carries a life force that produces all life and influences everything. Thus, Alkebulan (2005) writes all human creation and natural phenomena emanate from the productive power of the word, which is itself a

life force. This life force is essential to understanding how the Dogon people connect the power of words to the power of creation, particularly as they believe that to command things with words is to practice magic. Jahn (1961) addresses this in his book *Muntu: African Culture and The Western World* when he writes:

According to African philosophy man has, by the force of his word, dominion over ‘things’; he can change them, make them work for him, and command them. But to command things with words is to practice ‘magic’. And to practice magic is to write poetry... (p. 135)

I admit that the connection between magic and poetry appears strange in this context, but here, poetry is meant to emphasize the rhetorical art of magic. However, as Asante (1972) notes, African art is never art for art’s sake; it is always functional. And this is true whether we are speaking of music, poetry, or public speaking. All these art forms draw on the magical power of words, and for the Dogon people, all magic is word magic (Alkebulan, 2005). But Jahn (1961) asserts that to practice ‘magic’ is a weak expression. The African poet, or rhetor, “is not ‘an artist using magic’, but a ‘magician’, a ‘sorcerer’ in the African sense” (p. 135). Jahn (1961) describes this as the magic of metamorphosis. Nommo, the word, creates images upon images and transforms them and the rhetor with them. This is to say that, in the African sense, words or language are more than just tools; rather, they are the essence of life—a force through which the rhetor is able to create and transform the world—and, as Jahn writes, the rhetor “is subject to the same magic of constant transformation” (p. 138). Hence, I argue that Black Language is more than words, grammars, or syntax; it is a rhetorical art form—a discourse that creates, sustains, and transforms the world through the magical power of Nommo.



## **Magic as Rhetoric, Language, and Literacy**

Word magic is rhetorical, and the power of rhetorical action is, dare I say, magical. Hegel (1988) argued that this power is a direct power over nature as one brings external things into a connection so that they act upon one another according to one's purpose. Thus, Hegel (1988) writes, "it is the one trained [in traditional lore] who freely releases [the power of] the world in its quality and qualitative connections" (p. 227) or what he specifically calls "magicians." In his book *A General Theory of Magic*, Mauss (1972) notes that in magic, there are officers, actions, and representations and that a person who accomplishes magical actions is a magician. Mauss (1972) further notes that "a magician is a man who has special qualifications—special relationships and, more particularly, special powers" (p. 40). These special powers come to be through the endorsement of public opinion, for as Mauss (1972) states, "it is public opinion which makes the magician and creates the powers he wields." In other words, when a community is persuaded by a person's word magic or rhetorical action, then the person is understood as a magician or having special power. This is especially important in the context of Black prophetic rhetoric, where the community is a defining component of the rhetorical situation. Johnson (2012) argues that there is no prophetic discourse outside of community, so for a prophet or prophetic rhetor to be recognized as such, the people or public must agree that the discourse is important, sacred, or *magical*. I will return to the connection between magic, the magician, and Black prophetic rhetoric, but for now, I will focus on the first of these three—magic.

Magic is real action. Something really happens, often something violent, usually something of consequence. People are shaken, influenced, healed, destroyed, transformed. The social situation is altered (O'keefe, 1982). At the very root of the word *magic* is the meaning "action," which is derived from many languages; for example, *factum* in Latin and *Zauber* in

German are words meaning magic that come from the verbs “to do” (Mauss, 1972; O’keefe, 1982) Likewise, in India, the word which best corresponds to western conceptions of the “word ritual” is the word *karman* which means action. Thus, magic and action are bound together, but the question is through what means are they bound? It is through language that the relationship between magic and action is forged. Indeed, while magic uses material symbols, the ultimate reference is usually to the verbal symbols of language (O’keefe, 1982). Perhaps, this is why Professor Dumbledore says in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, “Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it” (Yates, 2011). This is to say that, through words, magic comes alive in the sense that it becomes generative and productive to the extent that the magician wills it. Put another way, magic is and always has been a symbolic action in the service of individuals for social transformation.

Covino (1994) argues that magic is a term through which we can address the ways in which words make real things happen. Indeed, he writes:

Magic is not the instant and arhetorical product of an otherworldly incantation; it is the *process* of inducing belief and creating community, with reference to the dynamics of a rhetorical situation. Magic is a social act whose medium is persuasive discourse, and so it must entail the complexities of social interaction, invention, communication, and composition. (p. 11)

What Covino (1994) argues is that magic is inherently rhetorical. Its lifeforce is persuasive discourse—a movement within the message that compels and influences an audience. Kennedy (1992) describes this as a type of energy. He writes:

Rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the *energy* inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the *energy experienced* by the recipient in decoding the message. (p. 2, emphasis mine)

This energy is the magic of rhetoric which calls things into being through the power of language and symbolic action. As O'keefe (1982) notes, magic frequently appears to be the use of these symbolic powers to counter the terrors of the symbolic world that man has created and to get some control over it. In other words, magic is rhetorical action aimed at effecting change in the world. As such, the magician (or rhetor) uses their magic (or rhetorical power) to make and remake realities or to transform the world. As Covino (1994) concludes, we “do magic” when we “do rhetoric” (p. 22) and vice-versa. But the issue is not whether rhetoric is magic; it is about *whose* magic and what effects they can produce through their magic rhetoric. For as O'keefe (1982) states, in magic, individuals draw on powerful collective symbols and use them to think and act effectively in the dangerous symbolic world in which they live.

The question of whose magic is at play in each rhetorical situation is important to the present analysis as the question implies a contradiction between various magical or rhetorical performances. At the center of the question is yet another question: whose magic matters? If magic and action are bound together through language, then it is the language of the magician or rhetor that is contested, and much more, the world the magician fashions through the magic power of rhetoric. Freire and Macedo (1987) address this when they write:

If adult literacy was once treated and realized in an authoritarian way, centered on the magical understanding of the word, a word bestowed by the educator on the illiterate, and if the texts generally offered students once hid much more than they revealed in reality,

now literacy as an act of knowledge, as a creative act and as a political act, is an effort to read the world and the word. (p. 43)

What Freire and Macedo (1987) identify as the “magical understanding of the word” is but one side of the figurative coin. For them, the magic character of the word is rooted in a dangerous authoritarian power that is viewed or conceived as a sort of salvation for the perceived “illiterate man.” Through this lens, the “illiterate man” is understood as lost, blind, and existing outside of the socially constructed reality that sustains the status quo. The magical understanding of the word, in this sense, is seen as a vehicle of power aimed at saving the “illiterate man” through a salvific process that, Freire and Macedo (1987) write, “is in passively receiving the word as a kind of amulet – one that the “better part” of the world benevolently offers him” (p. 42.). This is what Foucault describes as discipline which produces subjected and practiced bodies, more specifically, “docile” bodies. Foucault (1977/2010) argues that discipline...

Dissociates *power from* the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an “aptitude,” a “capacity,” which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of *the energy, the power* that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (p. 182)

Though he does not explicitly name it, Foucault acknowledges the magical power of rhetoric and discourse and *what might result from it*. Such power proves to be a threat to dominant ways of knowing and, as such, is seen as something that must be controlled. Foucault exposes the ways in which various techniques, practices, and processes become institutionalized as instruments of power that serve to discipline bodies into normalized behaviors. Thus, to address the question of whose magic matters, one must also grapple with the struggle between different magic powers—a struggle marked by constant conflicts between rhetorics of change and stability in society.

Brown (1972) provides a framework which explains the clash between those empowered by what Covino (1994) describes as “the literate establishment” (p. 2) and those whose knowledge of the world proceeds from outside of it—what Freire and Macedo (1987) describe as the “illiterate man.” Brown (1972) writes:

It is here that we find a situation which has been observed both to foster sorcery accusations and to offer scope for resort to sorcery. This is when two systems of power are sensed to clash within the one society. On the one hand, there is *articulate power*, power defined and agreed upon by everyone (and especially by its holders!): authority vested in precise persons; admiration and success gained by recognized channels. Running counter to this there may be other forms of influence less easy to pin down—*inarticulate power*: the disturbing intangibles of social life; the imponderable advantages of certain groups; personal skills that succeed in a way that is unacceptable or difficult to understand. (p. 124, emphasis mine)

What Brown describes as “articulate power” complements what Freire and Macedo (1987) describe as an authoritarian and salvific power exercised by the state through various institutions including education. Such power is used to normalize practices and reify hegemonic ideologies. Consequently, articulate power is used to demonize nonstandard practices, so as Brown (1972) notes, in situations where articulate and inarticulate power clash, there is usually a greater fear of sorcery or magic power. Indeed, articulate power promotes a single, unitary image of making one’s way in the world, but inarticulate power, albeit a disturbingly pejorative term, promotes a double image which stresses pluralism, possibility, and potentiality. While much of the literature situates these two powers within a magical-nonmagical binary, I must return to the African philosophy, which argues that “all magic is word magic.” Asante (1998) writes that, by the

nature of traditional African philosophy, rhetoric in the African sense is “an architectonic functioning art, continuously fashioning the sounds and symbols of the people even as it reenacts history” (p. 81). Given this, I believe that both articulate and inarticulate powers possess the power of magic rhetoric only to different ends and by different means. The former, as Brown (1972) writes, “feels challenged, through conflict, to uphold an image of itself in which everything that happens, happens through articulate channels only...” (p. 124), and the latter constitutes a magical affront to institutionalized stability which provokes articulate powers (Covino, 1994). The magic inherent in “inarticulate power” is what fuels the practice of disrupting and recreating articulate power through rhetoric, language, and literacy to generate multiple perspectives and ways of understanding the world. This is what makes Black magic—the magic of Black cultural expression—so important as it functions as a liberatory framework that disrupts the single image of cultural hegemony.

### **Black Magic and Liberation Literacies**

In her talk, Lyiscott addresses the struggles between magic rhetorics in the context of colonialism. She references the book *Decolonizing the Mind*, in which East African author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes about living in colonial Kenya. Lyiscott states:

He was there before Kenya was colonized. He said there was a time when the language of the classroom and the language of the community were one but then came a colonial education. He said Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet, right? But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. He said the bullet was the means of physical subjugation; language was the means of spiritual subjugation.

In raising this point, Lyiscott indicates how colonizing measures constitute an “articulate power” which aims to enforce unified, normalized linguistic practices through disciplinary coercion to establish a link between what Foucault (1977/2010) describes as “an increased aptitude and an increased domination” (p. 182). Lyiscott continues by saying that:

What would happen is if you were caught speaking your mother tongue, *Kikuyu*, in the classroom in colonial Kenya, you would either be physically beaten, or you would have to wear a sign around your neck that said, ‘I AM STUPID’ or ‘I AM A DONKEY.’ It was very important to the colonial subjugation process that the language of the people who were being oppressed was divorced from the community. Those are some of the practices that we reiterate today.

In her book, *Black Appetite, White Food*, Lyiscott (2019) writes that after reading Thiong’o’s work, she was shocked to learn that the context of the colonial classroom was so similar to contemporary classrooms across the United States. She writes that while students are not physically beaten for speaking in the language of their communities or forced to wear physical signs, “the work of silencing, shaming, and severing the linguistic and cultural practices of the home in an effort to adopt “Standard American English” (SAE), purported to be the “language of power,” is the work of K-12 classrooms” (p. 39). Lyiscott emphasizes that soldiers wielded the sword and the bullet, but teachers wielded the chalk and the blackboard. Hence, as she says in her address, “*when I talk about liberation literacies, the work that I do with educators across our country, it's because that historical and contextual dissonance that I'm bringing up plays out right now in our world.*”

In addressing the effects of coloniality on language planning and practices in schools, Lyiscott takes a critical turn in her promotion of a Liberation Literacies pedagogy. Particularly,

she invites her audience to grapple with the reality of how colonizing discourses often filter through instructional communication or classroom discourses. Through an Aristotelian framework, one might perceive this as employing pathos or an emotional appeal, but through an Afrocentric lens, I believe Lyiscott's rhetoric is best understood through the Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) principles of Ma'at. The ancient Egyptians conceived of speech as essentially an ethical activity of tremendous power that could be used for good or evil. Karenga (2003) notes that the very concept *medu nefer* means "good speech" and *nefer* translates to both "morally good" and "aesthetically beautiful" (p. 11). This philosophy complements the Quintilian rhetorical philosophy of "a good man speaking well," but in the Kemetic philosophy, Ma'at is guided by seven cardinal virtues: truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. Karenga (2003) argues that this ethic core in Kemetic rhetoric "makes it resistant to the artifice and dissimulation that are so prevalent in much of what passes as rhetoric and rhetorical instruction" (p. 11).

I believe that Lyiscott rhetorically invokes the spirit of Ma'at, not just to appeal to her audience's emotions but rather for the audience to take inventory of their teaching by virtue of what Ma'at represents. By this, I mean that Lyiscott hails her audience, through a rhetoric of interpellation, and challenges them to consider the kind of speech they practice in the classroom. Indeed, teaching is a rhetorical discourse, but as the ancient Egyptians understood, it can be used to promote good or evil; unity or division; tyranny or democracy; and dare I say, articulate or inarticulate power. Crawford (2004/2007) describes the implications of this Egyptian rhetoric in instruction and pedagogy concluding that "an educational system with a framework that engages the Ma'atian ethics can reform the African personality and that of all human beings" (p. 134). Lyiscott seems to take on this Ma'atian ethic to encourage a Liberation Literacies pedagogy that



sustains a rhetoric conducive to creating a just society, education, social justice, equality, and elevating the human condition. This is a magic rhetoric, because Nommo flows through it. Alkebulan (2005) notes that the ancient Egyptians believed that the living person expressed the nature of Ma'at and that its essential quality related to the life sustaining power of speech itself. She writes, "The Dogon's conception of the word and its life sustaining power is no different from that of the ancient Egyptians" (p. 380). Hence, in promoting a Liberation Literacies pedagogy, Lyiscott endorses a framework through which the magical power of the word flows in service of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order.

Asante (2003) notes that, through Nommo, critical discussions about world problems occur which can lead to creative solutions. Lyiscott demonstrates this when she introduces the third principle of her Liberation Literacies framework. She says:

The third "A" speaks to *actualization*. This principle— this paradigm principle says if we do not create continuous opportunities to actualize different ways of knowing and being and expressing in institutional spaces then we're not doing this work. And that goes directly to the term liberation...

Here, Lyiscott seems to illustrate the kind of Nommo literacy rooted with her framework. By this, I suggest that in calling for actualization in education and schooling, Lyiscott moves for liberatory teaching that is both generative and productive—capable of disrupting the current rhetorical situation. She continues saying:

It reimagines the way that we can interpret the world if we understand the power that happens in the margins. And so that liberation piece speaks to the disruption that happens in actualization...

Lyiscott challenges members of her audience to imagine what teaching would look like if they were Nommo literate; that is, what if they allowed magic rhetoric power (“inarticulate power”) to flow from the margins and disrupt the “articulate” forces that perpetuate cultural and linguistic hegemony in the classroom. She further asserts that it would mean that students could insert themselves into the narrative of history to say: *“I’m gonna go up and I’m gonna speak from the power of my voice.”* To this, Lyiscott says: *“That’s actualization; that’s disruptive, and that’s powerful.”*

It bears repeating that while Lyiscott argues for all culturally and linguistically diverse students, she places particular emphasis on Black modes of expression. Indeed, elsewhere Lyiscott (2017) engages Geneva Smitherman in a fictive dialogue noting the power inherent in Black forms of expression and how these have always been disregarded and even punished in the classroom. Lyiscott (2017) writes “This is my concern. The way we (dis)regard Black textual expressions within classrooms reflects larger social attitudes about Black lives” (p. 50). In calling for actualization in her Liberation Literacies paradigm, Lyiscott seems to endorse the kind of Black magic rhetoric which proceeds from the Necromancer. Smitherman (2007) writes that a Necromancer is a skilled manipulator of the Art of Black magic whose job is “to heal Black folk through the evocative power of Art and transform their suffering into constructive political action” (p. 78). Smitherman contends that such Black Art (or magic) must be functional and relevant to the lives and daily struggles of Black people. The kind of transformation of which Smitherman writes is subsumed in the liberation that Lyiscott promotes, but this Black magic rhetoric provokes dominant systems of power that actively work to expel it from its institutions. Therefore, I contend that a Liberation Literacies pedagogy can only exist outside of the dominant narrative of the institution and, thus, functions as a Black fugitive pedagogy.

## **Black Fugitivity, Pedagogy, and Prophetic Rhetoric**

In this section, I must briefly return to the rhetorical discourse of Black Liberation Theology which serves as a lens for Lyiscott's liberatory framework. Cone (1970/2020) argues that responding to the Black condition takes on the character of rebellion against things as they are. He states that the rebel is the one who refuses to accept the absurd conditions of things but fights against them despite the impossibility of arriving at a solution. Hence, as Cone (1970/2020) writes:

In Black Liberation Theology, blacks are encouraged to revolt against the structures of white social and political power by affirming blackness, but not because blacks have a chance of "winning." What could the concept of "winning" possibly mean? Blacks do what they do because and only because they can do no other; and black theology says simply that such action is in harmony with divine revelation. (p. 26)

Through her Liberation Literacies pedagogy, Lyiscott encourages a similar revolutionary paradigm through which teachers take on a liberatory praxis to disrupt traditional norms of what knowledge and literacies are valued and validated in traditional educational contexts. As I mentioned, I see this as constituting a fugitive pedagogy. Indeed, Lyiscott says in her address:

I work with members of historically marginalized communities, young Black people who say yes, I engage in Black literacy practices but in places where I feel safe. A sense of *fugitivity* exists there that has historical resonance in American chattel slavery—a time when it was illegal for Black people in this country to be able to read and write. A lot of that resonates with what's happening today in our classroom and in our world ... And if we think about that— if we think about what it means in our institutional spaces to continue participating in the erasure and the oppression of people from historically

marginalized groups instead of incorporating, validating, and celebrating who they are in these institutional spaces, then we do a disservice to ourselves and to our world.

Lyiscott recognizes fugitivity as a course of action often taken by the Black youths she engages in her work. As she describes it here, fugitivity functions to create sanctuaries or safe places where Black students can maintain what bell hooks (2003) calls an *integrity of being* or being one's authentic self. Lyiscott points this practice toward the classroom and toward the teacher to consider the magical power embedded in a pedagogy marked by fugitivity. Givens (2021) notes that a fugitive pedagogy names the educational acts of escape constituting the precondition of Black freedom implied by the very notion of "education as freedom" (p. 13). From this, I conclude that, like the Exodus rooted within Black Liberation Theology, fugitivity is a principal component of Lyiscott's Liberation Literacies pedagogy because it invites teachers and students to reimagine schools as sites of freedom and education as a practice of freedom. In the next section, I aim to clarify this notion of fugitivity, specifically within the context of Black educational life.

### **Black Fugitivity**

As Lyiscott mentions in her address, the history of Black fugitivity can be traced to fugitive practices in response to U.S. chattel slavery. In this case, fugitivity connotes an enslaved person escaping their captivity to seek freedom from bondage (Stovall & Mosely, 2022). Robinson (2005) notes that the earliest forms of rebellion against enslavement "took the form of flight" (p. 130). He argues that African fugitives were less interested in dismantling plantations than in recreating their communities outside the boundaries of European domination. Hence, as Givens (2021) defines it, fugitivity is "the constant seek of an outside to white supremacy that might elusively be understood as black freedom" (p. 10). This constant pursuit for an "outside"

space or place is an essential hallmark of the Black fugitive project, for as Givens (2020) says elsewhere, no practice of escape has been permanent for Black people. Thus, Black fugitivity is suspended in hope, for as Stovall (2017) writes, fugitivity in this sense “is not running *from* something, but running *to* something” (p. 331). Stovall and Mosely (2022) argue that fugitivity leads to “steal away” spaces that offer Black folx generative ways to create radical and positive alternatives that nurture political action, especially in educational contexts.

Givens (2021) argues that fugitivity is the metanarrative of Black educational history. It enunciates subversive practices of Black social life in the African diaspora over and against the persistent violence of white supremacy. Hence, ross (2021) uses the term ‘Black educational fugitive space’ to describe an intentionally radical site of possibility that exists in the margins outside of the typical discourses of schooling. In these fugitive spaces, education is meant to challenge teachers and students to question conditions and reimagine how teaching and learning “could lead to a situation where young people decide to refute the schooling that continues to dehumanize them” (Stovall, 2020, p. 3). To this end, fugitivity is best understood as a social and rhetorical frame by which we interpret Black folx’s pursuit to enact humanizing and affirming teaching and learning practices. And fugitive pedagogy, as Givens (2021) writes, “might be thought of as what it means to put this philosophical ideal into practice” (p. 13). Simply put, at the core of Black fugitive pedagogy is rhetoric—a Black magic rhetoric that is constitutive and generative, capable of reimagining educational situations that lead to social transformation.

### **Black Fugitive Pedagogy**

bell hooks (1994) knows *a lil sum ’n sum ’n bout* the magic rhetoric in fugitive pedagogy. She writes that:

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, [and] spontaneous shifts ... To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage “audiences,” to consider issues of reciprocity.

Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning. (p. 11)

The performative act which hooks describes is rhetorical performance at work in the activity of teaching. Specifically, hooks (1994) advocates for teaching, or performative acts, which enables transgressions— “a movement against and beyond boundaries” (p. 12). Indeed, bell hooks calls for a transgressive (or fugitive) pedagogy that makes education the practice of freedom. hooks (1994) acknowledges the rhetorical function of teaching as the magic art that inspires change in the classroom through transgressive political agency. In his reading of bell hooks, de Velasco (2008) writes that the primary sites for critical transgression entail those norms that designate “when speech is appropriate, who is authorized to speak, what one should say, and how one should say it” (p. 395). He notes that we become free when we start to loosen the fixity of these norms in our daily lives and can rebuild community around more fluid and democratic axes. If the Black experience has taught anything, it has revealed that radical and spontaneous shifts, for which bell hooks and de Velasco advocate, require a radical energy that is fugitive in nature, for as Zaino (2021) writes, “fugitive activities can be individual or collective, *spontaneous* or calculated, but they are united by a commitment to dreaming and enacting freedom” (p. 68).

Lyiscott (2020) argues that, for educators committed to racial equity with an understanding of the enduring systemic violence that continue to threaten Black lives, “sustaining fugitive literacy practices—where youth develop the tools to liberate themselves

from whiteness and anti-Blackness—is crucial” (p. 259). Lyiscott further elucidates the heurism of fugitivity in Black educational life as it comes to bear on Black students’ ability to talk back and talk Black in fundamentally racist educational spaces. This leads me to Lyiscott’s fourth principle in the Liberation Literacies paradigm: achievement. In her address, Lyiscott says:

The fourth “A” speaks to *achievement* because a lot of times when, when I do this work, there are folks who are like ‘well, you know you just want- you want the kids to be lazy.’ Actually, it takes a lot more work to be fully invested in *who you are* [and] *what you have to say* than to perform school for somebody who is imposing a structure on you.

Through the principle of achievement, Lyiscott acknowledges that a Liberation Literacies pedagogy is not only fugitive for teachers but is also fugitive for learners. Givens (2023) notes that historically Black children as fugitive learners had embedded meaning. He writes that “the language of “fugitive” denotes the competing narratives of black students’ lives, emphasizing how they operated in a tradition that defined their purpose and status as human beings on terms *outside* of the nation’s laws and dominant racial ideology” (p. 56). I emphasize the usage of “outside” here because it indexes the constant pursuit of hope for fugitive teachers and learners as they imagine ways of knowing and literacy that diverge from the articulate power. This is not a rejection of learning and schooling but an “inner divergence” and vigilance of school content and structures (Givens, 2020). Hence, Black fugitive learners maintain an awareness of what they do and why it is worth taking the risk. Critical awareness speaks to the intentionality of their fugitive disposition and all they can achieve in their educational fugitive space.

Returning to the fourth principle of Liberation Literacies, Lyiscott contends that “*achievement means that we have rigorous powerful standards not just for our students but for our classrooms and our institutions.*” This principle challenges the audience to consider the

extent to which institutions and classrooms achieve the aims of true diversity and equity. More to the point, Lyiscott seems to encourage her audience to imagine fugitive methods of instruction that lead to racial equity in education. Indeed, Lyiscott (2020) writes:

What acts of flight—what texts, literacies, cultural practices—must be sustained in the classroom to break free from the pervasiveness of anti-blackness and white supremacy and move us toward the liberty of centering and owning marginalized ways of knowing that exist beyond the scope of normative schooling? (p. 261)

Achievement, in this sense, is more about transforming the classroom space. Indeed, it is about how educators can use the power of their magic rhetoric to (re)imagine the classroom as a fugitive space where students can find refuge and agency in the clear literacies that forge a clear awareness of the systems of power, while actively pursuing freedom from these systems. As Lyiscott says in her address, “*So achievement is not unidirectional; it says we want to understand how engaging in this process transforms the student but how engaging in this process transforms the space and transforms the discipline.*” Hence, the classroom becomes a site of transformation through Black radical means to promote a pedagogical rhetoric of freedom and liberation that disrupts the tyranny of the literate establishment—that is, the dominant articulate power that infringes on the magic of Black textual and cultural expressions. Such a Black fugitive pedagogy maintains a radical rhetoric much like what Nunley (2007) calls a hush harbor rhetoric – “a rhetorical tradition constructed through Black public spheres with a distinctive relationship to spatiality (material and discursive), audience, African American *nomoi* (social conventions and beliefs that constitute a worldview or knowledge), and epistemology” (p. 222). In the hush harbor, space becomes a salient aspect of the rhetorical situation. As Nunley (2004) writes, because the spatial is ideological, space bears a rhetorical component with it. All



of this is to say that as a Black fugitive pedagogy, Lyiscott's Liberation Literacies paradigm functions as a radical, hush harbor rhetoric that disrupts the rhetorical power of the classroom space. This rhetorical action is fugitive and radical—it is prophetic.

### **The Black Fugitive Prophet**

Fisher (2022) notes that radical rhetorics, such as Nunley's hush harbor rhetoric and what I have described here as Black fugitive pedagogy, are characterized by what scholars call parrhesia which, according to Nunley (2011), "alludes to fearless, dangerous speech" (p. 46). He continues by saying:

Parrhesia requires the rhetor to put herself at risk in speaking truth to power, to the dominant political rationality, or to a hegemony that could result in the loss of status, influence, resources, legitimacy, or life. African American parrhesia, then, embodies the aforementioned, but the African American parrhesiastes deploys African American truths and knowledges through African American terministic screens.

What I find particularly useful in Nunley's description is how he underscores the inherent risk in speaking truth to power. This is important in the context of Lyiscott's Liberation Literacies pedagogy because, as a radical fugitive rhetoric, it requires a bold, fearless rhetor who understands the risks of exodus and exile. Indeed, as I discussed earlier, Liberation Literacies pedagogy, much like Black Liberation Theology, is rooted in an exodus from white supremacist ideology and epistemology. Within this pedagogical framework, the rhetor critiques and challenges the single narrative of a "white man's history" by generating and highlighting Black cultural knowledge and histories as a parallel narrative for students in the classroom. The exodus, then, is important in this liberation paradigm as it situates the rhetor as a sort of "outsider-within" (Collins, 2000) – that is, the educator who subscribes to a Liberation Literacies pedagogy is

always at once *in* the institution, but not *of* the institution which allows them to incite social change within the educational space. And while this action is notable and heroic, it is important to note that educators who take on the charge of such rhetorical action are also at risk of exile from the institution they wish to change. Hence, as Lyiscott (2020) writes, “the fugitive moves from refuge to refuge. From freedom to freedom. Building allies, shaping tools, and beating paths along the way” (p. 260). One vital tool that shapes the magic rhetoric of Liberation Literacies pedagogy is the adoption of a rhetorical persona.

Jasinski (2003) notes that when scholars speak of the presence of a persona in a text, they usually use the term in a way that clearly distinguishes what it represents from the real author or speaker. This is to say that literary and rhetoric scholars tend to draw a line between the rhetor as a person (personal ethos) and the rhetor as a persona (image of what the rhetor represents). Johnson (2010) writes that one persona available for rhetors is that of a prophet. He argues that “when a rhetor adopts a prophetic persona, he or she may attempt to do several things at once, but the primary reason is to dictate the rhetorical situation” (p. 268). Johnson (2012) contends that the problem with the rhetorical situation is that it is an arbitrary construction that does not consider what the prophet, or rhetor, does to (re)create the rhetorical situation. In other words, there is no consideration of the discursive strategies the rhetor employs to (re)constitute the controversy they are addressing. Therefore, Johnson (2012) writes, “in prophetic discourse, the discerned context helps shapes the discourse” (p. 16). I argue that Lyiscott adopts and promotes a Black fugitive prophetic persona—what I call the Black fugitive prophet—for her message to be heard. Lyiscott (2020) writes:

I call for us to dream of fugitivity and freedom with the knowledge that we are the living ancestors of generations to come. This challenge necessitates boldness and risk. It calls us

to break away from whiteness and anti-Blackness in ways that feel foreign to our traditional ways of knowing and being. It calls us to press toward visions of freedom from the tyranny of whiteness and anti-Blackness that we cannot yet see. It calls us to not just sit idly by as we benefit from those ancestors who risked their lives for freedom, but to participate in the tradition and blueprint of their survival. (p. 260)

Lyiscott's position is clear. The path toward liberating the Black literate is forged through the magic of Black fugitivity that our ancestors modeled for us. Indeed, for Lyiscott, fugitivity for the ancestors involved a deep knowledge of the threat of pain and violence imposed by chattel slavery alongside a vision of possibility, hope, and freedom beyond the parameters of slavery. Hence, Lyiscott adopts the Black fugitive prophetic persona to stress the need for rhetorical action in the classroom to promote a paradigm or classroom discourse that aims to liberate the Black literate and other culturally and linguistically diverse students.

I define the *Black fugitive prophet* as the type of prophetic persona in which one takes on the image of the abolitionist to (re)constitute an oppressive rhetorical situation that sustains and supports white supremacy or any other dehumanizing systems. I believe Lyiscott adopts this prophetic persona in her address, especially as she discusses her final paradigm principle. She states:

And then, the last "A" speaks to *alteration* and *action* ... this is a principle that says that we are invested in understanding – that our institutions must be adaptable, must be accommodating, and truly inclusive of diverse ways of knowing. So, once we understand the way that a different form of literacy, that a linguistic repertoire – the history, the cultures, the memories of the young people that we work with – once we understand the way that challenges this institution, we think about how we reimagine the institutional

space. My curriculum can't stay the same. My pedagogical approaches cannot stay the same. This institution might need to reimagine itself.

Here, the Black magic power of Lyiscott's rhetorical argument can be felt as she challenges her audience with the need for rhetorical action in the classroom that transforms the classroom space. As a Black fugitive prophet, Lyiscott transcends notions of reformation and calls for educators to dismantle the policies and practices that diminish and dehumanize students' linguistic identities. Notably, she calls for a pedagogy rooted in the Black rhetorical tradition – a pedagogy empowered with rhetorical action. My initial reading of Lyiscott's seemingly overuse of the words "imagine" or "reimagine" gave me pause. I interpreted this usage as mere contemplation, wishful, or magical thinking. However, I finally came to understand, as many sociolinguists contend, that thought informs language, which informs action. By stressing the need to (re)imagine the classroom space and the world, Lyiscott invites her audience to consider the magic of Black fugitivity as a generative power that pedagogues possess. This magic rhetorical power is architectonic and capable of calling justice and equity into being within the classroom space. Through the magic power of Black fugitivity, Liberation Literacies pedagogy is realized, and the oppressions of classroom discourses are contested while the cultures of marginalized students are sustained. Lyiscott states, "*We gotta challenge the idea of what teaching and learning looks like because I'm learning from this cultural space that there are different ways of imagining our world.*" Her call to action is inherently prophetic. I read Lyiscott as a Black fugitive prophet who exists *within* but not *a part of* the academic institution. In this prophetic persona location, Lyiscott makes the clarion call to critique, challenge, and change the classroom space or the education system for the sacred mission of liberation.

## Conclusion

At the time of this analysis's invention, magic forces in the world seek to oppress the masses. Legislations are being passed in southern states to prevent the telling and teaching of Black histories, cultures, languages, and literacies. Such articulate power threatens cultural pluralism in education and schooling at every institutional level. Lyiscott's address draws upon and promotes the magic rhetoric power of Nommo to produce the passionate language of Liberation Literacies pedagogy. Indeed, my reading of Lyiscott's talk stresses the emphasis on transgressive teaching within the classroom but apart from the oppressive literate establishment of schooling. Drawing on Black Liberation Theology, Lyiscott reveals that a liberatory literacy education must be radical, magical, and fugitive. Thus, in challenging how English classes are silencing students of color, especially Black students, Lyiscott takes on the prophetic persona of the Black fugitive prophet to lead her audience into imaginative possibilities of liberation and freedom that can and should be realized in the classroom.

In this chapter, I have argued that Lyiscott's address embodies the magical power of Nommo to promote a pedagogical paradigm that liberates the already literate Black Language-speaking student. Surpassing existing discourses centered on critical literacy, Lyiscott develops a framework for Liberation Literacies by drawing on the rhetorical power of Black magic—the same magical energy that James Cone used to develop Black Liberation Theology. Indeed, Lyiscott uses this Black magic rhetoric to expose its healing and liberatory properties, which are needed to usher in a new dispensation of Black fugitive pedagogy. At the core of Lyiscott's argument for a Liberation Literacies pedagogy is an architectonic, constitutive rhetoric that bears witness to linguistic justice and anti-black linguistic racism in the classroom. This same Black magic rhetoric is inherently fugitive as it forms “outside” of institutions of power to facilitate

social transformation, for as Audre Lorde (1984/2007) has said, “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (p. 112). Hence, Lyiscott offers us a look into the Black radical tradition towards the hope embedded in Black prophetic rhetoric to encourage sustainable change through critical Black language awareness.

## CHAPTER 4

### **“My Black and My Language is Beautiful”: Anne Charity Hudley and The Prophetic Rehabilitation of Black *Languages Matter***

In 2020, Dr. Anne Charity Hudley was invited to participate in Duolingo’s Duocon 2020, a free global event at the intersection of language, learning, and technology. Constrained by the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic, Charity Hudley shared a live virtual presentation titled “Black Languages Matter: Learning the Languages and Language Varieties of the Black Diaspora.” Formerly the North Hall Endowed Chair in the Linguistics of African America at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Charity Hudley’s research addresses the intersections of language variation and education with particular emphasis on the language education for and language use among African Americans and the African diaspora. She continues this work now as the Bonnie Tenenbaum Katz Endowed Professor of Education at Stanford University, where she focuses on the relationship between language variation and educational practices and policies from preschool through graduate school, creating high-impact practices for underrepresented students in higher education.

In her talk, Charity Hudley grapples with the bipartite pandemic of the global health crisis (COVID-19) and racial injustice in the United States. Following the tragic murder of George Floyd, Charity Hudley’s talk, as the title suggests, draws on and expands the discourse of Black Lives Matter (BLM) as a framework to advocate for the relevance and legitimacy of languages in the Black or African diaspora. Charity Hudley argues that Black Languages surpass common examples in sports and entertainment; instead, she stresses how learning and understanding Black language variations provide insight into various aspects of Black culture, Black people, Black literacies, and Black lives. Charity Hudley’s talk aims to respond to public

outcries regarding how to help make change and make true the idea that Black lives matter. Thus, she promotes critical Black language awareness as a prophetic discourse that disrupts the narrative of white linguistic hegemony and colonialism.

In this chapter, I analyze Charity Hudley's talk focusing on how she constructs a two-edged sword in her advocacy of Black languages. On the one hand, she takes on the task of historicizing, contextualizing, and legitimizing Black languages. In doing so, Charity Hudley addresses an audience whose understanding of Black languages and literacies is limited or influenced by white supremacy and colonialism. On the other hand, Charity Hudley's talk implies another audience that aligns with the ideological framework of the BLM movement. For this audience, Charity Hudley takes on the task of acknowledging, edifying, and providing hope to speakers of Black languages throughout the diaspora.

My analysis leans into how Charity Hudley employs what I am calling *prophetic rehabilitation* through a BLM framework to promulgate critical Black language awareness. Through prophetic rehabilitation, I argue that Charity Hudley offers rhetorical healing and restoration to Black Language speakers and those Black and non-Black people whose perceptions of Black languages are marred by racist, classist, and colonial language ideologies. To do this, I offer the following analysis of Charity Hudley's 2020 talk in which I grapple with three critical-cultural discourses: (a) African Diaspora Literacy, (b) Black Lives Matter, and (c) Black prophetic rhetoric. Through my engagement of these controversial yet important discourses, I work to develop and delineate *prophetic rehabilitation* as a rhetorical framework that highlights critical rhetorics of healing, specifically within the context of critical Black language awareness. In the next section, I provide an overview of the effects colonialism has had



on language socialization in education and schooling, as well as the development and use of Black languages in the U.S. and the diaspora.

### **Colonialism and Black Language(s): The Project of Linguistic Hegemony**

According to Rabaka (2010), colonialism has been a consistent struggle in the lives and on the lands of various peoples who have had comparably different historical experiences. This is especially important in the context of the Black or African diaspora, for as Rabaka (2010) writes, we cannot afford “to gloss over the precolonial, colonial, and possible postcolonial life- and language-worlds of historically and currently colonized people” (p. 48). The history of colonization for people of African descent is far too extensive to address here, not to mention the ensuing emotional labor of such an undertaking. Therefore, for the moment, I aim to zoom in on the colonial treatment and effects of language socialization, particularly as it relates to Black or African people on the continent and throughout the diaspora, and the effects this has had on education and schooling.

Fanon (1967) addresses this phenomenon, noting that every colonized group finds itself face-to-face with the language of the civilizing nation or the more dominant cultural standards. Explicitly addressing how this affects Black folk, Fanon writes:

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being ... I am not unaware that this is one of man’s attitudes face to face with Being. A Man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. (p. 18)

Not only does Fanon (1967) expose and critique the way colonialism has subjugated Black and African people, but he also critiques the way colonialism transforms or erases Black and African

cultural identities through language socialization and linguistic hegemony. Fanon's preoccupation is primarily with French as a colonizing language; however, English has been a dominant language of power in the Western world for centuries. Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) note a widespread and inaccurate societal belief that there is a monolithic, unchanging English language standard that belongs to whiteness. They write, "This belief originated in colonial models of education that served to oppress colonized peoples by making the colonizer's language the only one valued in education, business, laws, and society in general" (p. 26). Let me be clear in saying that standard language ideology is a vehicle of power used to perpetuate the lie of symbolic superiority. The devastating reality is that too often and too many Black and African people have accepted this lie (me included) at one point or another disrupting Black or African cultural and linguistic identities. Hence, as Fanon (1967) writes, "Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black man express himself *properly*, for then in truth he is putting on the white world" (p. 36, emphasis mine).

Eriksen (1992) notes that in the modern world, "there is a marked tendency for many cultural differences to be smoothed out and to disappear" (p. 316). This holds true in the case of linguistic difference. This hegemonic process aims at a linguistic unification in society where the dominant culture subjugates localized and marginalized linguistic styles. Brandist (2015) writes:

The social dialects arising as a result of the class differentiation of society are in no way [the national language's] equals ... they are interconnected by complex interaction, by hierarchical subordinations and struggles ... In this interaction and struggle, the national language acts as a social norm which dominates all other social dialects...The cultural hegemony of the ruling class in turn conditions its linguistic hegemony. (p.141-142)

While Brandist's work is rooted in a Russian context, his sentiments can be applied to Black speech communities across the diaspora as he argues that the fundamental difference between a national language and social dialects is not linguistic but one of social function. Thus, minoritized languages such as Black or African languages around the world are often socially isolated because the expectation is for speakers to assimilate into the dominant standardized language. As a result of this unifying effort, marginalized groups are expected to become more like the dominant cultural group. It becomes clear that linguistic unification or homogenization is an integral aspect of most nation-building projects, as language socialization is an ideological state apparatus employed to normalize dominant ways of speaking. As Alim and Paris (2015) note, despite widely professed values of egalitarianism, equality, or equity, "linguistic hegemony is framed as beneficial to linguistic "minorities" rather than harmful, and linguistic homogenization is presented as preferable to linguistic diversity" (p. 79). As such, linguistic hegemony functions as a means of cultural erasure to which oppressed groups succumb, consciously or unconsciously.

According to Wiley (2000), linguistic hegemony is achieved when "dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic" (p. 113). This occurs through the consistent consumption of messages at various institutional levels. Suarez (2002) notes that daily forms of linguistic hegemony include using the media, academic institutions, and social relationships to associate linguistic minorities with inferiority, lower self-esteem, and belittlement – yet, to present positive associations with the dominant language and culture. When sanctioned in social institutions such as school systems, the mass media, and the political system, this hegemonic messaging "encourages a mass of inferiority complexes and the eventual abandonment of maternal languages among minorities"

(p. 317). Linguistic hegemony is evident in many spaces throughout society to sustain the idea that the dominant lingua franca is needed to advance in life. To this end, it is easy to understand how linguistic hegemony functions in educational spaces to encourage the convergence of standardized linguistic styles and the divergence of marginalized linguistic styles. As Eriksen (1992) notes, in defining minority languages as deficient, the hegemonic-national language justifies its exclusive use in education and other official contexts and thus efficiently prevents non-fluent users from obtaining institutional power.

According to Clark (2013), many students are literate in more than one language. Yet, the literacy practices of many mainstream schools tend to ignore this fact, so students eventually leave behind any language or literacy practice other than what is associated with the dominant language. bell hooks (1994) argues that standard English is not a speech of exile; instead, it is “the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear...” (p. 168). Reflecting on the linguicide of enslaved Africans, hooks (1994) writes:

Only as a woman did I begin to think about these black people in relation to language, to think about their trauma as they were compelled to witness their language rendered meaningless with a colonizing European culture, where voices deemed foreign could not be spoken, were outlawed tongues, renegade speech. (p. 168)

bell hooks puts into perspective the emotional damage of linguistic dominance on Black and African people. While her emphasis is on the Black experiences in the United States, it goes without saying that linguistic hegemony is a global and multigenerational trauma that Black and African people have experienced worldwide. Clark (2013) notes, “there is a potential tension, then, between linguistic varieties evident in the linguistic landscapes that surround us beyond the

school gate or learning spaces, and those that are taught within them” (p. 60). The push for universal, standardized language and literacy practices constitutes strong ideological control or domination. Linguistic hegemony, then, transforms “subaltern literacies into a general literacy, purportedly universal yet controlled by elites, held out as a universal ideal yet stratified and unequally available” (Collins, 1989, p. 13). I should note that not only is classism a byproduct of linguistic hegemony, but so is racism. From a critical race theory perspective, Baker-Bell (2020) argues that linguistic racism is normal and an everyday experience for most linguistically marginalized people of color living in the United States. She writes, "It is so normal that it is difficult to address because it is not acknowledged as a form of racism. And although linguistic racism is socially constructed, like racism, it is permanent and ubiquitous in the U.S. society” (p. 16). Grieser (2021) contends that white racial power “provides downward pressure that tends to suppress language variation under the guise of teaching varieties of English deemed as “professional” or “school,” or otherwise seen as superior” (p. 48). Hence, Eurocentric linguistic hegemony becomes the order of the day in most schools where Black linguistic practices are sidelined as deviant or deficient.

Eurocentric linguistic hegemony permeates education and not only disadvantages racially minoritized people in schools but also controls the cultural value and identity of minority social groups (Henaio, 2017). The dominant white culture often determines which linguistic practices are appropriate within educational spaces by exacting dominance within society. Wolff (2017) addresses the colonial power of Eurocentric linguistic hegemony when he writes:

The current Western mindset would view the European standard languages of the former colonial powers as being ‘essentially superior’ to the ‘essentially inferior’ indigenous vernaculars, often belittled as ‘dialects’, outside the Western world.

Consequently, in this line of thinking, all ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’, in particular (higher) education, can only and must be conducted in these ‘superior’ languages in order to meet the models provided by ‘Western civilisation’. (p. 2)

Wolff (2017) suggests that education and schooling are subject to hegemonic influence as it relates to language planning, policy, and practice. Catering to Europeans and white Americans for centuries, education and schooling are situated to maintain a narrative reflecting a colonial white or European history. Within the dominant white society, many believe that minoritized cultures such as Black or African communities speak improper dialects, tell stories incorrectly, and communicate in a more primitive English variation. As a result, educational institutions strive to teach these racially, culturally, and linguistically minoritized students the “correct” way to speak (Henao, 2017). More pointedly, the ways of speaking associated with Black speech communities are too often devalued and ignored in the classroom. Thus, as Alim and Smitherman (2012) argue, “white mainstream English and white ways of speaking *become* the invisible, 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” (p. 171). The process of “becoming” which Alim and Smitherman (2012) strategically identify is the result of linguistic hegemony—the process by which the English language is standardized in education institutions under the guise of academic achievement, career success, and social mobility.

Justified on the grounds of clarity and correctness, “School English” and the corresponding English-only movement in educational institutions function to normalize spoken and written language in educational settings, which stipulates depersonalized language as the model for organized thought in language (Wright, 1980). By raising the point of depersonalized

language, Wright (1980) reveals how educational systems function through hegemonic influence, insistence, and ideologies. Indeed, such hegemonic influence and colonized thinking inform racist and prejudicial language policies and practices in education. As Young (2010) argues, languages, dialects, or style do not make one vulnerable to prejudice—attitudes do this. He calls into question what scholars have later coined as raciolinguistic ideologies or attitudes, which, according to Young (2010), “Be the way folks with some power perceive other people’s language” (p. 110). Winford (2003) reveals how Black Language has been assaulted on many ideological levels. One ideology he describes is *ideology and prestige*, which contributes to the notion that languages have the power not only to shape the way people talk and interact generally but also to naturalize relations of power and privilege. According to Winford (2003), this assumption, when applied to the Black speech community, means that “African Americans uniformly judge Standard English to be “prestigious” and AAVE to be stigmatized” (p. 30). Such ideologies that tacitly or overtly advocate for assimilation and homogeneity must be challenged to dismantle anti-black linguistic racism in education and society so that individuals’ rights to their own language can be made manifest (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz, 2022).

Lauwo (2020) notes that language, education, and colonization are inextricably linked. Colonial discourses in education perpetuate a “hegemony of speaking” in which “other ways of viewing and being in the world are unacknowledged” (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2011, p. 77). This colonial mentality disciplines Black and African folk into ways of being and knowing that are averse to Black and African epistemologies. Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari (2016) note that fragmenting bodies of knowledge obscure the linkages necessary for understanding that the yanking of linguistic minority students’ tongues is undemocratic and reminiscent of colonial policies. Therefore, understanding linguistic hegemony as a colonial project means disrupting the

perceived innocence or well-meaning intentions often associated with linguistic discrimination and anti-black linguistic racism. By this, I refer to the notion that imposing English onto Black and other culturally-linguistically diverse students is seen as doing them a favor or done with the intent of preparing them for a successful life. The use of “colonialism” in this context calls out the racist and xenophobic assault on minoritized languages and insists that we grapple with the language ideologies and dominant values that inform language policy and practices in schools and society. As Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari (2016) argue:

The position of U.S. English-only proponents is not very different, for example from that of European colonizers who tried to eradicate the use of African languages in institutional life and who inculcated Africans with myths and beliefs concerning the savage nature of their cultures through educational systems which used only European languages.

This English-only movement agenda in the United States and around the world points to a pedagogy of exclusion in which the teaching and learning of standardized English is paramount to rid Black and Brown students of a perceived language deficiency. This agenda devalues and aims to silence the languages spoken by an ever-increasing number of linguistically diverse students who attend our schools and academic institutions across the nation and around the world. Indeed, as Chawla and Rodriguez (2011) write, “*What* and *who* is unspoken is also often about *who* and *what* is being silenced, marginalized, and colonized” (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2011, p. 85, emphasis mine). To this end, embracing and promoting culturally relevant education practices that actively resist hegemony, domination, and cultural dispossession is important. Such work has been pursued through the framework of African Diaspora Literacy, which I describe in the next section.



## **African Diaspora Literacy: The Healing Antidote**

The violence of colonial education systems derives partly from linguistic and epistemic hegemonies that systematically delegitimize marginalized languages and knowledge systems. This, in turn, disadvantages students who use these languages and limits the expansion or development of human knowledge. Many education systems are more oriented towards enculturation into colonial values and a neoliberal education agenda than towards having direct relevance to minority discourse communities (Lauwo, 2020). Undergirded by institutional policies, these language practices must be addressed through a decolonial project that seeks racial, cultural, and linguistic justice. While Charity Hudley frames her argument using a Black Lives Matter lens, her argument for the legitimacy of Black languages is situated within a global, diasporic context. For this reason, I propose African Diaspora literacy as a culturally sustaining project and instructional discourse that informs Charity Hudley's public pedagogy, which disrupts hegemonic racism and colonialism and promotes cultural and linguistic emancipation.

King (1992) defines diaspora literacy as Black people's knowledge of their collective story and cultural dispossession. She contends that this knowledge base can start a journey of self-recognition and healing as it enables Black people to repossess their story, including our cultural identity as Africa's children. Indeed, as Boutte (2016) notes, diaspora literacy relates to people with African origins, wherever they are in the world. Hence, she punctuates diaspora literacy with the use of "African" to distinguish it from other forms of diaspora literacy (i.e., Asian Diaspora Literacy, Latinx Diaspora Literacy). Rooted in a Black Studies ethic of deciphering rhetorical mystifications and Black cultural discourses, African Diaspora literacy forms an ideological critique of the sociohistorical knowledge that "maintains destructive consciousness of class, race, ethnicity, and personality that constricts the human spirit and

perpetuates violence and inhumanity” (King, 1992, p. 320). Thus, as Boutte et al. (2017) write, African Diaspora Literacy challenges and critiques social and equity issues while building the racial and ethnic uplifting of people who are often on the margins of society.

African Diaspora Literacy emanates from an Afrocentric or Afrocultural worldview and emphasizes the ways in which this cultural framework democratizes visions of history through which all Black folx can “re-member” or reconnect to knowledge about the past that has been torn apart by Eurocentric narratives (King and Swartz, 2016). Subsumed within an Afrocentric (culturally informed) praxis, African Diaspora Literacy bears with it an orientation towards Afrocentricity which King and Swartz (2014) argue is “a framework within which to construct curricular knowledge so that all cultures and groups speak for and about themselves through scholarship that unearths and centers their voices” (p. 13). Asante (2003) notes that Afrocentricity is “the belief in the centrality of Africans in post-modern history” (p. 11). It is a direct counternarrative to a hegemonic grand narrative presupposing that all that is not of Europe is not of worth (Jackson, 2003). Afrocentricity contends that our main problem as African people is our usually unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and perspective and their attendant conceptual frameworks. As a result, according to Mazama (2001), we find ourselves “relegated to the periphery, the margin, of the European experience, to use Molefi Asante’s terms—spectators of a show that defines us from without” (p. 387). In other words, and to use Afrocentric terminology, we do not exist on our own terms but on borrowed, European ones. Afrocentricity contends and rests upon our ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, and speaking and consciously replace them with ways germane to our own African cultural experience.

To this end, African Diaspora Literacy fosters a love to be Black and African, revealing how Black people across the diaspora connect to Africa. African Diaspora Literacy highlights love for Blackness and centers the humanity of Black people across geographical contexts (Johnson, 2019). Whether we are in Africa, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Caribbean, or the United States, Black and African cultures, histories, and literacies deserve to be taught and celebrated. Kazembe, Etienne, and Jackson (2021) stress the geographical aspect of African Diaspora Literacy through what they call “geoliteracy”—the multiple ways in which people understand, interpret, and interact with the world. They reveal that “For Black children, geoliteracy is especially important because of its potential to expand and deepen their knowledge of history and culture” (pp. 77-78). This process is critical to the cultural consciousness of Black people in general but for Black students specifically as the classroom is such an influential space in Black students’ socialization. Jackson et al. (2021) connect West African Adinkra symbols and Kwanzaa principles to contemporary artifacts to share ways that love of Blackness can be celebrated at home and in local communities. These are but a few examples of how people have used African Diaspora Literacy to educate Black and non-Black publics about the beauty of Black and African cultures.

### **African Diaspora Literacy and Black Languages**

One additional aspect of culture that illuminates Black folk’s connection to Africa is Black or African diasporic languages which Johnson (2019) describes as “the rich and soulful language spoken by many Black folks in the United States, who share historic and contemporary ties to African Pidgin languages” (p. 10). Smitherman (2006) notes that Black Language is a style of speaking English words with “Black flava—with Africanized semantic, grammatical, pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns” (p. 3). She contends that the Africanization of U.S.

English has been passed on from generation to generation, and each new generation stamps its own linguistic imprint on the language. Drawing on the work of Geneva Smitherman, Baker-Bell (2020) uses Black Language intentionally to acknowledge Africology theories “that maintain Black speech is the continuation of African in an American context” (p. 3). African Diaspora Literacy promotes a collective agenda for Black and non-Black folx to become literate about our shared culture. Boutte et al. (2021) note that all around the world, there are parallel forms of Black or African American Language—in the United States, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and so forth. Our rich linguistic heritage is but one thread that keeps us connected.

In her talk, Charity Hudley stresses this connection between language and the Black or African diaspora as a way of framing culture. She states:

I think about culture not just as artifacts or tools or tangible elements, but how people in a particular group, for me the Black diaspora, have values, symbols and interpretations and perspectives that distinguish people in the Black diaspora and really share their identity and culture ... We know that pidgins and creoles have a history in the change and varieties of languages as they come into contact with each other, as people, particularly from Europe, colonized places and brought enslaved people to them. But what that really did was create a diaspora that we can trace through the languages, through the language use, the vocabulary, the grammar, the cultural ideas that are shared.

In making this connection, Charity Hudley aligns with the work done in and through African Diaspora Literacy, for as King (2005) writes “Language is fundamental to culture, consciousness, and identity” (p. 27). Charity Hudley encourages the kind of Black or African cultural consciousness that transcends tangibility and is rooted in symbolic meaning-making. As King and Swartz (2016) note, for students (and people, generally) whose ancestral cultures are

oral and communal, performance that uses imagination and language effectively resides in their group memory as heritage knowledge. As Charity Hudley reveals, despite their history with colonialism, Black languages are an integral part of how the Black and African diaspora came to be. In their study on African Diaspora teaching, Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) found that African Diaspora Literacy useful in fostering positive linguistic identities of Black or African American Language speakers. They write:

Teaching precolonial African contributors to the world's knowledge, we had laid the groundwork for teaching about the colonization, colonizers' inaccurate depictions of Africans, how the African Diaspora developed, and the vast knowledge and languages Africans brought with them. We then taught how, as African languages meshed with each other and the languages of their oppressors, new languages developed, such as Patois and Gullah and eventually AAL. (p. 424)

Each of these scholars maintains the heuristic value of African Diaspora Literacy as a liberatory and culturally informed praxis through which Black languages are understood and celebrated as resilient, resistive, and relevant.

### **African Diaspora Literacy as Healing Power**

I wish to raise one final and important note regarding African Diaspora Literacy, which centers on its healing properties. Johnson (2019) notes that African Diaspora literacy “brings healing and restoration to classroom spaces and beyond through analyzing anti-blackness and the wounds that continue to exist because of anti-blackness and the lack of critical knowledge that people possess about Africa” (p. 11). Such healing is rooted in a love ethic as it works to raise students' consciousness. bell hooks (2001) writes:

Embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love ... in our everyday lives. We can successfully do this only by cultivating awareness. Being aware enables us to critically examine our actions to see what is needed so that we can give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn. (p. 94).

African Diaspora Literacy allows Black and African people to repossess our collective story which was once dispossessed from us through colonialization and U.S. chattel slavery. This is what King and Swartz (2014) mean by “re-membling” as African Diaspora Literacy allows Black and non-Black folx to make cultural connections that broaden their understanding of Black and African histories, knowledges, and literacies. This is represented in the “Sankofa” concept which is pictorially symbolized as a bird whose head is looking back (representing the past) while its body is facing forward (representing the future). The concept of Sankofa is an Akan term that means “go back and fetch” (Watson-Vandiver & Wiggan, 2021). Hence, emphasizing heritage knowledge within the Black or African diaspora allows Black and non-Black folx to gain knowledge from Black or African cultural past and bring to the present to make positive progress.

Boutte et al. (2017) argue that African Diaspora literacy can be used as a process for interrupting the ongoing effects of oppression that Black children face. They further contend that it can be used “to heal them from the ongoing cultural assaults and damage to their African souls and spirits” (p. 67). Important parts of the African Diaspora Literacy process include helping people: (1) identify and name oppressions and their constituent components; (2) learn about their own history as a healing antidote against oppression; (3) imagine possibilities for a better world; (4) take reflective actions to interrupt ongoing oppression; and (5) organize and collaborate with others who are seeking to dismantle oppressive structures (Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017;

Jackson, 2022; Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019). Teaching through and about African diaspora literacies fosters: (a) positive racial and gender identities, (b) community, and (c) positive linguistic identities in the work to help children to love themselves, their histories, and their peoples (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). In expanding the discourse about Black and African people in the United States and around the world, educators who employ African Diaspora Literacy foster spaces that disrupt deeply embedded Eurocentric thinking, perceptions, and narratives by substantively and continuously including African Diasporic perspectives, knowledges, and content (Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019). This is what Charity Hudley does in her 2020 talk “Black Languages Matter.” In the following section, I offer a rhetorical analysis of this text to reveal how Charity Hudley, in the tradition of African Diaspora Literacy, works to restore and rehabilitate Black Language speakers and anyone who has been wounded by the discourses perpetuating anti-black linguistic racism.

### **If Black *Lives* Matter, then Black *Languages* Matter**

In the summer of 2022, I had the opportunity to travel to Nigeria, West Africa as part of a Fulbright-Hays Groups Abroad project. One of the first lessons we learned in Yorubaland is that the Yoruba people do not see themselves as separate from their language. In short, to *be* Yoruba is to *speak* Yoruba. This philosophy holds true across the Black or African diaspora. Delpit (2002) writes that “Just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world ... our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*” (p. xix). This is to say that we not only use language *to speak* but also *to be*. Knowing that others perceive us according to what we say and how we say it, we use language to shape how others see us (Barret, 2018). Alim (2016) notes that through raciolinguistic performances of Blackness, we can employ linguistic resources as speakers that help us shape

and engage in processes and projects of identification. In delineating various approaches to the study of race and speech, Anderson (2015) notes that the ethnographic approach locates Black or African American Language in the individual or community practices rather than in voices. According to Anderson (2015), “The underlying philosophical assumption here is that language is a practice that is socially enacted and recognized, relational, and political” (p. 777). Theorizing links between race and speech in this way necessitates a reformulation of how the study of language practices and perceptions arise and how knowledge about them is generated.

Charity Hudley’s talk seems rooted in this ethnographic approach to the extent that she works to roll back harmful perceptions and ideologies regarding Black languages and Black culture. For her, there are three important aspects concerning what needs to be known about Black languages and Black culture. First, it is important to know that Black languages and language varieties exist. Second, it is important to know what Black languages and varieties look and sound like. Finally, she contends that it is important to know how Black languages impact the Black experience. While I agree that each of these is important, I find Charity Hudley’s final assertion to be of particular importance given the current social and political climate where the study of Black or African American cultures, histories, and literacies has been nitpicked so much to the point that legislators have decidedly rejected it as having little to no instructional value. Taylor (2023) notes that on February 1, 2023, the first day of Black History Month, the College Board released its long-awaited curriculum for a new Advanced Placement class in African American studies. Two weeks earlier, the Florida Department of Education rejected the course, claiming that it lacks educational value and is contrary to Florida law. When the College Board released the revised curriculum, all the sections that Florida complained about, including any



mention of Black Lives Matter, had been removed—most of which served as inspiration for the course. Taylor (2023) writes:

It is hard to reconcile that inspiration with the decision to excise almost all mention of Black Lives Matter, intersectionality, police brutality, or any of the litany of issues that shape the experiences of Black people in the United States. (para. 2)

This blatant performance of Black racial and cultural erasure begs the question of not only *where* Black lives matter but *to whom* Black lives matter and *in what ways* do Black lives matter.

Charity Hudley begins her talk acknowledging the terrible strain and struggle people in the United States were facing in 2020 considering the global health crisis but also the country's political unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder. She states:

We are all currently in a moment of pandemic and protest and people from all throughout the world have been reaching out to me to ask, "What can I do to help make change and make true the idea that Black Lives Matter?" And I've been encouraging people who love language, who love linguistics to really use that interest, that talent, and that joy to help learn more about Black language, Black culture and the languages and the language varieties of the Black diaspora.

For Charity Hudley, the call to action is both simple and complex. To join the fight for Black lives, it is important to affirm textual, cultural, and discursive forms of expression among and within Black speech communities. Baker-Bell (2020) writes that, like the mission of Black Lives Matter, linguistic justice is a call to action "to radically imagine and create a world free of anti-blackness ... to create an education system where Black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, their resistance MATTERS" (p. 3). Young (2020) underscores this affirmation by

highlighting how people in our society are conditioned to be violent toward Black folx who speak Black languages or even that speak so-called “Standard” English with a Black or African American accent. The denial of full Black humanity is precisely what the BLM movement challenges. Richardson and Ragland (2018) contend that the phrase “Black Lives Matter” is subversive in and of itself, as it challenges the institutional, political, and societal practices, and all the ways in which the state is complicit in depriving Black folx of their humanity, their culture, and their lives. For Charity Hudley, the connection between Black languages and Black lives cannot be severed, thus “Black language matters because Black lives matter” (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz, 2022, p. 23).

### **My Black and My Language is Beautiful**

In my reading of Charity Hudley’s talk, I identify three primary arguments that she makes to affirm *how* and *why* Black languages matter. The first of these is that Black languages are beautiful. In her talk, Charity Hudley states:

The most important concept when we're learning about Black languages and Black language varieties is that language is culture, and your language is your Black. And so, in this way, both your Black and your languages are beautiful.

Inherent in Charity Hudley’s claim is the need to address and correct the harmful thinking and attitudes that cast Black languages in the dark, ugly shadow of standardized English. Such thinking and attitudes demonize Black languages while reifying what Lanehart (2015) calls “the myth of Standard English” (p. 868). These attitudes are too often internalized in Black folx producing self-hate, for as Lanehart (2015) writes “That is what society and history teaches. Being Black is not being White and not being White is, well, a problem” (p. 868). I interpret Charity Hudley’s claim as a means to restore the cultural value embedded in Black languages so

that Black Language speakers (and others) better understand that, culturally and linguistically, Black languages have worth. As Boutte (2016) notes, in a racially stratified society such as the United States, Black people are not highly valued as a group. Hence, she writes, “many people hold Black culture and language in low esteem” (p. 107). By affirming the languages of Black folx, Charity Hudley not only affirms Black lives, but she also challenges her listeners to critically interrogate racist language ideologies that undermine and devalue Black languages and Black language varieties.

Lanehart (2015) notes that many people who speak a variety of language that is not valued or held in esteem experience and express denial, regret, and loss. Black Language speakers have historically been asked to deny or hide their native languages while embracing and valuing standardized English. However, through the lens of Black Lives Matter, Charity Hudley emphasizes linguistic pride and acceptance as a way of restoring Black Language speakers to honor and appreciate the beauty of their languages but also to connect those languages or language varieties to the beauty of African culture. Richardson and Ragland (2018) argue that Black Lives Matter expands upon Black language traditions and creates its own semiotic system and literacy practices to signify pride, resilience, and affirmation of all Black humanity. So, in framing her argument through a Black Lives Matter lens, Charity Hudley bolsters the import for cultural pride regarding Black languages to raise awareness of their value in and out of Black communities. Indeed, across the Black or African diaspora, the cultural value placed on Black language practices can be seen in the socialization of community members into these practices. Black speech communities imbue meaning, significance, and value into their linguistic practices and identities. As Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) write “From a Black-centered perspective, the cultural value of Black language practices is even more important, because it is

through language and communication that social relationships and community belonging are forged” (p. 25).

By asserting that Black languages are beautiful, Charity Hudley offers a view of Black languages that emphasizes their community linguistic capital. Building on Yosso’s model of community cultural wealth, community linguistic capital is understood as a body of knowledge about language and communication that functions as community cultural wealth, including the linguistic flexibility to use multiple language, varieties, and/or styles (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz, 2022). Incorporating the Black Lives Matter framework, Charity Hudley’s talk serves as a context not only for discussing anti-black linguistic racism, but it also releases a rhetorical healing agent that actively restores and shifts Black and non-Black attitudes about Black linguistic, cultural, and racial identities. Charity Hudley models the kind of pedagogy that Smitherman (1977) encourages for Black students especially. Smitherman (1977) writes that:

If the masses of black kids are ever going to catch up with their white counterparts, such negative attitudes and behavior must be replaced by *a genuine kind of teacher warmth*.  
One that sincerely accepts the inherent legitimacy of the many varieties of English ...  
One that recognizes the connection between language and oppression and thus motivates the teacher to work to sever that connection ... This requires teachers able to cultivate in students a sense of respect for, perhaps even celebration of, linguistic-cultural differences... (p. 219, emphasis mine)

While there is much to extrapolate from Smitherman’s call, what I find most compelling is the need for a “genuine kind of teacher warmth.” I interpret this as a sort of revolutionary pedagogical love through which teachers, as Charity Hudley demonstrates, can empower Black

and non-Black students by celebrating and valuing Black languages and cultures. Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte (2019) define this revolutionary love as a deep-seated love bounded in action which disrupts social constructions such as anti-blackness and white supremacist patriarchy through the practice of humanizing love. Wynter-Hoyte et al. (2022) note that teachers who embrace revolutionary love honor everything about their students, including their home languages. They do not view students' home languages as inferior to standardized English; instead, "they honor what makes all students unique, including their home languages" (p. 106). As Charity Hudley says in her talk, "The study of Black language and culture helps us to see that the diaspora is real." And when we understand the realness of Black lives throughout the diaspora, we understand that those Black lives matter and so do their Black languages. Indeed, as Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) contend, "Our language is who we are and what helps us make it on through this world" (p. 26).

### **Black Language is Not Broken**

The second argument that Charity Hudley makes in defense of how and why Black languages matter is that Black language is not broken. She states that:

An important concept for the Black diaspora is that your language is not broken, and neither are you. This is really important because in the history of segregation, discrimination, colonization, the languages that Black people speak have been described as broken or incomplete and so a lot of this work really helps support the idea that there is no broken English, not for Black people, but really not for anyone.

Indeed, what Charity Hudley articulates is true especially regarding Black languages. DeBose (2007) notes that when a language or way of speaking is associated with the elite, the ability to speak that language serves a legitimating function where the superior position of the dominant

group is justified by its “proper” speech. Similarly, the subordinate position of marginalized groups is legitimated by the characterization of their language in such pejorative terms as “poor, slovenly, broken, bastardized, or corrupt” (p. 31). Further research reveals that the predominant view of Black languages among Black Language-speaking students is negative (Kirkland, Jackson, & Smitherman, 2001). In her study, Baker-Bell (2013) notes that the students she observed echoed this view by using terms, such as “improper,” “grammatically incorrect,” “broken English,” and “language of the ignorant and/or uneducated” to characterize features of AAL (p. 363). Each of these examples illustrates how linguistic bigotry exists throughout the world (Baugh, 2015). But more specifically, these examples reinforce what Baker-Bell (2020) writes when she says, “Internalized anti-blackness is REAL, and it will have you on the frontlines reinforcing a system of white supremacy and upholding racist policies and practices that legitimize your own suffering and demise” (p. 6).

By arguing that Black languages are not broken, Charity Hudley challenges the degrading and denigrating attitudes that influence the public consciousness and the public’s perception of Black lives and their intersecting identities. Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) contend that Black is beautiful, and Black Language is too. They write: “Given the principle that language *is* culture, we challenge the commonplace yet damaging belief that Black language varieties are deficient. Such claims are not true: Your language is not broken, nor are you” (p. 26). Hence, the argument against a perceived “broken English” is really developed to counter the prevailing claim that Black languages are deficient. Indeed, Charity Hudley advances the understanding that Black languages do not diminish the speaker’s intellect, aptitude, or vocabulary. As she and her colleagues note, Black students who advance through the formal U.S. education system often receive this false message (Charity et al., 2022). Take, for example, the

following excerpt from Bill Cosby's address at the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the "Brown v. Topeka Board of Education" court decision. Cosby (2004) says:

*Brown v. the Board of Education* is no longer the white person's problem. We've got to take the neighborhood back ... It's standing on the corner. It can't speak English. It doesn't want to speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk ... I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. Then I heard the father talk. This is all in the house. You used to talk a certain way on the corner and you got into the house and switched to English. Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. You can't land a plane with "Why you ain't." You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth. (p. 3)

I contend that Cosby engages in anti-blackness as he refers to the Black neighborhood with the neuter-gender pronoun "it" which is completely dehumanizing. In addition, Cosby perpetuates anti-black linguistic racism by suggesting Black speech patterns impede success. Such discourses maintain the hegemony of standard language ideology which Lippi-Green (1997) defines as "a bias toward an abstracted, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions..." (p. 64). This discourse is used by powerful gatekeepers, such as Bill Cosby and many others, as a rationale to maintain the dominance of English which subjugates the linguistic systems that emerge from marginalized speech communities. This is what makes Charity Hudley's argument so important.

Charity Hudley's claim that Black languages are not broken does at least two things. First, she exposes the history of degradation of Black languages as broken or deficient. Second, she further expands this discourse to highlight the multifaceted and multilayered functionality of Black languages. For instance, in her talk, she says:

Something important to know about African American languages and varieties and Black diasporic languages and varieties is that it's important to understand how much of the variety two different communicators actually understand.

Here, she stresses what is known as mutual intelligibility where two people can engage each other while speaking two different varieties of English, and they would both be correct in saying they speak English, or a variety of English. What is important to understand is that communication can occur between the two speakers. *Ion kno what Bill Cosby was talmbout!* Another concept that Charity Hudley discusses is that speakers of different language varieties can understand each other without much prior support. For instance, she shares the following story.

When I was a first-year student at Harvard University, my instructor ... was teaching pidgins and creole languages and she started to put some different forms on the board. I was a first-year student just getting started in linguistics and as she was speaking and writing, I realized I already understood what she was talking about. And so, what it made clear for me is that understanding how these varieties occur is not necessarily just something you would learn in a linguistics or language class, but through your lived linguistic experience. And that gives us the concept that we can really understand each other to varying degrees.

Through these examples, Charity Hudley reinforces the understanding that Black languages function like any other language where there are varying degrees of linguistic convergence and divergence depending on the interlocutors. Black languages or language varieties are not deficient nor are they broken; rather, they function in many ways and for various purposes which, in turn, produce varying degrees of community and communication.



While I agree with Charity Hudley that Black languages are not “broken” English, I do believe that Black languages break English. By this, I mean that Black languages can be understood rhetorically as a subversive linguistic system that resists and responds to the violent colonizing history of white linguistic hegemony. bell hooks (1994) writes of this when says:

An unbroken connection exists between the broken English of the displaced, enslaved African and the diverse black vernacular speech black folks use today. In both cases, the rupture of standard English enabled and enables rebellion and resistance. By transforming the oppressor’s language, making a culture of resistance, black people created an intimate speech that could say far more than was permissible within the boundaries of standard English ... It is absolutely essential that the revolutionary power of black vernacular speech not be lost in contemporary culture. That power resides in the capacity of black vernacular to intervene on the boundaries and limitations of standard English. (p. 171)

*Lemme tell ya, bell hooks be speakin’ my language!!* She emphasizes the ways through which Black languages disrupt white supremacist notions of an English standard as well as how Black ways of speaking forge a space for alternative cultural production and epistemologies. In describing this phenomenon, Umi (2022) states that,

English is not our language. It’s the colonial slave master’s language, so I don’t have any problems with messing up English words. I feel like when I mess up speaking English, that’s the ancestors pushing inside of me to fight back against the oppression that violently forced the language down on us in the first place. (6:09)

In her argument, Charity Hudley gets close to this idea of rupture and disruption but does not substantively grapple with this aspect of Black Language’s potential. However, as she positions her talk within the Black Lives Matter and African Diaspora Literacy frameworks, she

acknowledges how Black languages have been instrumental in the fight for human rights. For instance, she says:

This struggle for linguistic and human rights has been led by people who have been making linguistic and human rights true for people throughout the world. The work of leaders, including Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, show to us that the language of Black activism is powerful beyond measure. The human rights, the civil rights justice, that's been linguistically and rhetorically expressed by Black people has not just brought about rights for Black people, but rights for everyone. And so, understanding how Black communication happens gives us an idea on how we can have the linguistic and cultural power to change everything, the entire world.

For Charity Hudley, Black languages matter because they create powerful communities of practice which enable Black speakers to draw in an audience, give an audience hope, and make change happen. What Charity Hudley approaches is the inherent prophetic nature of Black languages in that they possess the power to challenge, critique, and change social situations. Hence, in drawing on the Black Lives Matter framework, Charity Hudley enters a rhetorical space in which she can rescript Black bodies (Langford & Speight, 2015). That is to say that Black languages and Black Language speakers are not broken; they are breakers, disrupters, and agents of change.

### **Black Language is Not a Monolith**

The final argument that Charity Hudley makes to support how and why Black languages matter is that they are not monolithic. In her talk, she says:

The study of Black language and culture has also shown that your Black doesn't have to look or sound like mine. The varieties are rich and real, and they are just now really

beginning to be described fully. So, I wanna encourage people to listen, learn and share so that the research can really reflect the fact that there is so much inherent, external, social, cultural, and identity variation within the Black diaspora.

Charity Hudley's message is critically important as it redirects false assumptions about a singular standard for Black speech. By invoking the Black or African diaspora, Charity Hudley signals that Black languages are just as vast and many as Black lives in the United States and around the world. In short, Black folx do not talk just one way, hence the emphasis on Black *languages* and not just Black Language. As Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) note, some Black folx speak African American English (AAE) or as I and others prefer, African American (Black) Language; others speak standardized English, and many others use them both in combination. The point is that Black folx are pluralistic in voice. Reflecting on her student experience, bell hooks (2014) writes:

The insistence on finding one voice, one definitive style of writing and reading one's poetry, fit all too neatly with a static notion of self and identity that was pervasive in university settings. It seemed that many black students found our situations problematic precisely because our sense of self, and by definition our voice, was not unilateral, monologist, or static but rather multi-dimensional. We were as at home in dialect as we were in standard English. Individuals who speak languages other than English, who speak patois as well as standard English, find it a necessary aspect of self-affirmation not to feel compelled to choose one voice over another, not to claim one as more authentic, but rather to construct social realities that celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm differences, variety.

Charity Hudley and bell hooks both oppose a monolithic view of Black folx and Black languages. In a similar register as bell hooks, Charity Hudley contends that Black language varieties are rich and real suggesting, as bell hooks articulates, that Black voices are multidimensional; therefore, Black folx cannot be limited to one way of speaking or to one way of expressing voice. In doing so, Black languages are unnecessarily codified which leads to rigid language classifications that are too often decontextualized and not rooted in community experiences. In stressing the heteroglossia of Black languages, Charity Hudley works to restore Black voices and to repudiate systems and practices that diminish and demean Black Language use.

Charity Hudley notes that there are recurring questions that she often receives, “especially when we know that learning English is important in the world.” These questions include: why then do languages still vary? Why are there still creoles? Why do people still communicate using Black languages if learning English is important? To address these questions, Charity Hudley states:

My argument is that people use their language variety because they want to preserve their meaning. So, while we could speak another language or another variety and express ourselves in--in different varieties of English, including standardized English, we preserve meaning and cultural value through our use of African American language.

*Maybe I need tuh end the diss right chea and pass a collection plate, b'cuz Sistah is preachin!!*

In making this argument, Charity Hudley indexes the resolution that was passed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) – namely, Students’ Rights to Their Own Language. Arguing that students, or anyone, should have the right to their language puts into perspective that many languages and language varieties co-exist and preserve cultural

meanings. But much more than that, as Charity Hudley contends, this resolution is important because it helps us understand how people also “preserve their humanity, their sense of community, and their dignity...” This must ring true for the entire Black or African diaspora. This means that Black folx deserve to know about the linguistic principles underlying Black Language practices. Specifically speaking to Black students, Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) write “You deserve to be able to explicate name, understand, and own the linguistic variation that you may have intuited throughout your life” (p. 41). Rejecting a Black Language monolith encourages Black Language speakers to explore and better understand the full range of their linguistic repertoire which indexes their racial, cultural, and otherwise identity-based choices and experiences. Through this, Black folx can reinforce the fact that their Black languages matter and so do their Black lives.

In her talk, Charity Hudley notes that documenting and sharing the variation among and within Black languages is important beyond interest because it has educational implications. Elsewhere, Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2018) draw attention to how the linguistic work designed to support Black Language speakers is well intentioned, although the work itself lacks racial and cultural theory which causes challenges. One such challenge is the fact that much information about Black languages employs a code-switching model. Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2018) argue that while code-switching models can help students use their knowledge of their home culture, language, and identity and build on it while helping students acquire standardized English, “code-switching models [also] help speakers to acquire standardized language while demeaning their home and communities in the process” (p. 518). Whether consciously or inadvertently, the message that students may glean from the hidden curriculum of code-switching is that students and educators are best served by leaving their cultural and social

identities at the classroom door. To this end, Charity Hudley’s argument against a Black Language monolith proves useful as it sheds light on the over-racialization of Black languages which often lead to eradicationist pedagogies such as code-switching. Such language planning promotes internalized racism, linguistic insecurity, and linguistic double-consciousness in students. Take for example the student experience that Jack Daniel (2018) shares when he writes:

I dwelled on my very complicated dilemma. Whites determined that my home language rendered me ignorant and nonprofessional. Hearing my altered speech, my friends accused me of trying to become White, frowning upon my roots. To further complicate matters, I had begun to like my new way of talking on campus because I thought I sounded more intelligent ... And when I listened to my friends ... they did sound a bit ignorant. (p. 90)

For all the Black folx like Jack Daniel across publics, both in and out of the classroom, Charity Hudley’s argument that Black languages do not have to look or sound like others is gravely important as it releases rhetorical healing and validates cultural-linguistic experiences that are too often shamed in institutional spaces. Indeed, as Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022) contend, Black folx are not a monolithic group and neither are Black languages, language varieties, and cultural practices. They further assert that how you use language is “shaped by the languages and language varieties of the communities that you are a part of as well as your individual experiences—including where you grew up, your friends and networks, your upbringing, educational background, personal style, and more” (p. 31). To this end, I argue that Charity Hudley’s talk functions as a form of rhetorical rehabilitation which I explain in the next section.

### **From Rehabilitating Rhetoric to Rhetorically Rehabilitating**

In his essay, Charland (1990) explores the ways in which rhetorical studies can be used to engage or interact with critical-cultural theory. He proposes that rhetoric needs to be rehabilitated to fill perceived gaps in communication studies. Of particular interest to Charland is rhetoric's place within the human and social sciences. He argues that there is "sufficient common ground to permit the interrogation of one intellectual practice by the other" (p. 259). This common ground provides the opportunity for what he calls a more "praxical theorization" of the relationship of discourse and power. By this, Charland works to integrate what he sees as the most beneficial and useful elements of both speech communities to develop "a partial unhinging of theory and practice from personal style and affect" which, in turn, "would permit an encounter of one with the other" (p. 260). The challenge with this critical interpretive discourse, as Charland (1990) describes it, is that both rhetoric and critical-cultural theory have blindspots.

Charland (1990) contends that rhetoric proceeds from the mainstream which places no value on marginalization, whereas critical-cultural theory proceeds from outside the mainstream driven by philosophy and theory. In his view, Charland (1990) argues that rhetorical theory "rejects the Foucaultian preoccupation with the other, with the marginalized and the silenced" (p. 260). Despite their emancipatory interests, Charland notes, critical-cultural theory's political focus is often displaced by the theorizing of pleasure or the pleasure of theorizing. Herein lies the blindspots which Charland argues must be addressed to adequately rehabilitate rhetoric, and by extension, rhetorical theory. Charland (1990) challenges the discipline to reckon with rhetorical theory's conservative blindspot. He writes:

Rhetorical theory usually does not render problematic the categories of the rhetorical situation. It tells us neither why certain occasions, speakers, and topics are privileged, nor

what unspoken interests are served, nor what audiences are excluded. Indeed, rhetorical criticism has far too often focused on “official” discourses in the less than open public sphere ... (p. 262)

Charland problematizes rhetoric’s history and limitations and calls for a rehabilitated rhetoric—one that draws on and from the emancipatory interest of rhetorical theory and the theoretical interest of critical-cultural theory. Such a rehabilitation of rhetorical studies, he writes, requires “an increased attention to political and cultural theory by rhetorical theorists...” (p. 263).

To forge an acceptable relationship between these two speech communities, Charland (1990) argues that critical-cultural theory bears with it a corrective that can shift rhetorical efforts toward an adequate theoretical framework that acknowledges “the place of discourse, the forces that put it in place, the ideological and affective grounds from which it proceeds, and the silences that are imposed” (p 263). He argues that critical-cultural possesses the capacity to foster an adequate theory of the place of discourse and identify the sites in which rhetorical action is needed, the audiences that await being addressed, and the interests those rhetorics must confront. Conversely, Charland (1990) further asserts that rhetorical theory and criticism can be used to remind critical-cultural theorists that “practical politics requires ideological work in the form of arguments that create good and compelling reasons or motives to act” (p. 263). In short, Charland recommends that rhetoric be opened not only to the validity of its own reluctance but to the extent where critical-cultural theory can inform the need for rhetorical performance which can lead to radical, social transformation.

### **Rhetoric, Parrhesia, and Black Prophetic Rhetoric**

In calling for a renewed approach and engagement within rhetorical theory, Charland (1990) acknowledges the obstacles that such a project would encounter, since as he puts it,



rhetorical studies is “rather staid” while critical-cultural theory “valorizes difference and *différance*, and is energized by its status as Other...” (pp. 259-60). Hence, the call for a productive dialogue between the two is a tall order. Fisher (2022) contends that while Charland’s proposition is wonderful, “there needs to be a broader road of rehabilitation than the one Charland offers in his essay” (p. 37). He argues that any rehabilitation of rhetoric must consider the cultural legacies of Afrocentric and Black liberationist perspectives. More specifically, Fisher (2022) writes:

Charland confesses blind spots with respect to insularity and the need to build bridges between rhetoric and other social sciences. At the same time, Charland neglects the blind spots of racial, gendered, abled, and classed theoretical frameworks that are part and parcel of any considerations that privilege Western, Eurocentric epistemologies. (pp. 37-38)

In response to Charland’s call for a rehabilitated rhetoric, Fisher (2022) makes the case for why Eurocentric, and otherwise conventional, methods of rhetorical studies are not neatly compatible with the Black rhetorical tradition. Specifically, he argues that Black prophetic rhetoric has been historically effective in “building social movements, institutions, and political power for disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed people of color” (p. 40). Hence, Fisher (2022) argues that if rhetoric is going to be sufficiently rehabilitated, it must take seriously the frameworks, texts, and musings produced from the Black rhetorical tradition—a tradition marked by radicalism and parrhesia.

Fisher (2022) places particular emphasis on the concept of parrhesia which Foucault (2001) describes as frankness, or the process by which the parrhesiastes (the rhetor engaging in parrhesia) “says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and

mind completely to other people through his discourse” (p. 12). According to Foucault (2001), most of the time, this concept has a positive meaning of truth telling through which the parrhesiastes “says what is true because he *knows* that it is true; and he *knows* that it is true because it is really true” (p. 14). Thus, as Nunley (2011) asserts, parrhesia alludes to fearless, dangerous speech. Extending Foucault’s engagement with this concept, Nunley (2011) writes:

Parrhesia requires the rhetor to put herself at risk in speaking truth to power, to the dominant political rationality, or to a hegemony that could result in the loss of status, influence, resources, legitimacy, or life ... African American parrhesia is often constructed as angry, militant, distorted, irrational, unreasonable, unpatriotic, divisive, and, of course, dangerous. However, the African American parrhesiastes who is willing to wedge African American knowledges and standpoints into the public sphere is highly valued. (p. 46)

In short, parrhesia is the bold, fearless kind of speech through which many Black folx have spoken truth to power to dismantle systems of oppression. Fisher (2022) situates parrhesia within the Black Prophetic Tradition contending that Black prophetic rhetoric historically has excelled in reconstituting the public with relationship to power and representation. Put another way, Fisher (2022) asserts that the Black Prophetic Tradition has historically and effectively restored or rehabilitated its publics through the rhetorical power of parrhesia which, he says, is akin to Black Linguistics: “a postcolonial scholarship that seeks to celebrate and create room for insurgent knowledge about Black languages” (Makoni et al., 2003, p. 1). *My Gawd, I feel my help!!* In drawing attention to the postcolonial project of Black Linguistics, Fisher (2022) reveals just how Black ways of speaking, Black people speaking, or Black Language speaking in a public sphere “is to some degree personifying parrhesia” (p 47). Hence, Fisher (2022) states that

there can be no legitimate rehabilitation of rhetoric that dismisses or neglects the personification of parrhesia especially as it is manifested in and through the Black Prophetic Tradition.

### **Black *Lives* and Black *Languages* Matter: Towards Prophetic (Rhetorical) Rehabilitation**

Fisher (2022) makes the call to expand Charland’s proposal to rehabilitate rhetoric, for as he says, rehabilitating rhetoric “requires a reconsideration of rhetoric’s relationship to power, white supremacy, sexism, classism, colonialism, and other Eurocentric epistemologies...” (p. 48). In response to Fisher’s call, I offer *prophetic rehabilitation* as a type of Black prophetic rhetoric which emerges out of my reading of Charity Hudley’s Duolingo talk. In calling attention to Charity Hudley’s rhetorical discourse, I follow Fisher’s lead in acknowledging the way Black Linguistics, Black languages, and Black Language speakers model the personification of parrhesia in ways that subvert and resist the forms of dehumanization and disenfranchisement that result from the Black rhetorical condition (Richardson, 2002). To this end, I define *prophetic rehabilitation* as a discourse grounded in the sacred rhetorics of healing that works to restore or rehabilitate a community of people from the damage of hegemonic discourses which threaten or devalue the community’s cultural identities. In other words, the rehabilitating prophet employs rhetorics of healing to restore the people from the injury of cultural hegemony.

I borrow from the work of Tamika Carey (2016) who defines rhetorics of healing as “a set of persuasive discourses and performances writers wield to convince their readers that redressing or preventing a crisis requires them to follow the steps to ideological, communicative, or behavioral transformation the writer considers essential to wellness” (pp. 5-6). Carey (2016) argues that these rhetorics transcribe problems into lessons by invoking messages of personal affirmation, notions of familial belonging, institutional responsibility, or broader racial uplift. Focused on rhetorics of writing and composition, Carey (2016) examines how rhetors use written

texts to pursue a goal of healing as an activist endeavor. My revision of this work reads Charity Hudley as a rhetor (speaker) who aims to restore and uplift Black Language speakers (and others) through the rhetorical campaign that Black Languages Matter. In promoting this rhetorical argument, Charity Hudley aims to teach individuals, within and linked to Black speech communities, ways of knowing, being, and speaking that enable them to reinterpret their pasts, revise their sense of self, and pursue an equitable future with a renewed hope in the community's cultural-linguistic identity.

In drawing on the Black Lives Matter framework, Charity Hudley situates her rhetorics of healing within the Black Prophetic Tradition. Indeed, Johnson (2023) notes that “Black Lives Matter acts a prophetic movement that provides a prophetic witness to the contextual realities faced by many African Americans” (p. 217). Black Lives Matter is thus a descendant of previous Black prophetic movements, in which people stand up and provide clarity and witness to the atrocities happening to Black bodies and in Black lives (Edgar & Johnson, 2018). Charity Hudley serves as a prophetic witness as she calls out, challenges, and corrects the inherently racist ideologies that influence the public's perceptions about Black languages. As a Black parrhesiastes, she opens her heart to her myriad audiences to speak the truth regarding the relevance, value, and legitimacy of Black languages throughout the Black or African diaspora. By asserting that Black Languages Matter, Charity Hudley postures herself as a community healer who not only focuses on the distressing ailment of anti-black linguistic racism, but also focuses on locating the root of the condition and uprooting it from the community to avoid its spread and continual harm. In this way, she aligns with the Black Lives Matter movement whose key platform is the conceptualization of structural violence as far-reaching and broadly applied. As Edgar and Johnson (2018) note, “BLM is interested in addressing all structural inequalities as

mutually reinforcing and interconnected systems of injustice” (p. 7). Through prophetic rehabilitation, Charity Hudley affirms that it is important to advocate for the study of Black languages, Black culture, Black varieties, African languages, and Caribbean languages so that human rights, human justice, and civil rights can be more directly tied to linguistic justice. Thus, as she ends her talk, she declares emphatically “In this way, for me, we really know that linguistically, culturally, and all the way around, Black Lives Matter.”

### **Conclusion**

Healing can be a difficult and continuous process. I am reminded of this fact everyday as someone who lives with a nonvisible disability. Still, healing is worth the pursuit. My reading of Charity Hudley’s Duolingo talk reveals the need for communal healing for Black and non-Black publics. Social institutions, including education, judicial, and healthcare systems, continue to propagate the ideologies of slavery and colonialism. This legacy of cultural violence has resulted in traumatic effects throughout the Black or African diaspora. As Watson-Vandiver and Wiggan (2021) contend, the psychological damages of hegemony are important for educators to address, especially at the curricular and pedagogical level. Through her public pedagogy, Charity Hudley accepts this charge by insisting that Black Languages Matter, and in doing so, offers a restorative instructional discourse that promotes positive Black identity. Charity Hudley draws from the rhetorical legacy of the Black Lives Matter movement to amplify a prophetic message that releases healing throughout the Black or African diaspora. Boutte et al. (2017) note that part of the difficulty in effectively teaching children from African backgrounds in ways that are healing, and restorative is that “many educators: 1) do not understand and/or respect Black culture and 2) believe that content taught in school is neutral or culture-free” (p. 71). Charity Hudley speaks through this difficulty. As a Black parrhesiastes, she remains committed to the truth about Black

culture, Black histories, Black languages, and Black lives—the truth that emphatically declares that Black Languages and Black Lives MATTER!

In this chapter, I have argued that Charity Hudley’s talk offers a sort of rhetorical healing and restoration to Black Language speakers and to those Black and non-Black people in need of a corrective discourse that addresses anti-black language ideologies. First, I discussed the colonial history and violence on Black and African linguistic identities. Then, I offered an overview of African Diaspora Literacy as a liberatory pedagogical discourse. Both discourses, colonial and liberatory, inform my reading of Charity Hudley’s talk as she argues for the legitimacy, value, and relevance of Black lives through Black languages and Black ways of speaking. My argument is that Charity Hudley’s talk is inherently prophetic as she situates her pedagogic discourse within a Black Lives Matter framework. Motivated by the rich linguistic cultures of the Black or African diaspora, Charity Hudley takes on the persona of the rehabilitating prophet to administer rhetorical healing to Black and non-Black audiences who have experienced injuries on social, psychological, and ideological levels regarding their perception of Black linguistic identities. Charity Hudley models the kind of pedagogical healing that humanizes Black folx and restores the celebration of their multidimensional identities. In asserting that Black languages matter, Charity Hudley prophetically weaponizes rhetorics of healing to challenge anti-black linguistic racism, for as she proclaims:

Black languages are beautiful.

Black languages are not broken.

Black languages are not monolithic.

**BLACK LANGUAGES MATTER!**

## CHAPTER 5

### Finishin' Where We Started...

Communication researchers continue to be interested in the process of teaching and learning. However, they do not always agree regarding methodology in instructional communication research. Sprague (1994) notes the lack of engagement across research perspectives among instructional communication scholars. She writes, “By becoming encapsulated in a single perspective, scholars limit how they see problems and therefore the ways they might come to understand them” (p. 285). Indeed, she argues that the more persistent and difficult questions are the very ones from which social scientists have retreated. However, these are questions “that [communication scholars] are uniquely positioned to tackle” (p. 286). Sprague (1994) concludes that the broad mission of instructional communication makes room for many research perspectives and the skilled use of many sophisticated methodologies.

More recently, Broeckelman-Posta and Mazer (2023) organized a forum centered on research methods in communication education scholarship. They invited essays exploring ways that we can learn from other disciplines and from other areas within our own discipline, to expand the methodological tools that we use in instructional research. Of the five essays published in the forum, only one essay remotely mentions rhetorical methods (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2023), and this mentioning is only used as a categoric marker to determine the type of article and methodology most published in *Communication Education*. Between January 2012 and May 2022, LeFebvre and LeFebvre (2023) found that the journal published articles that were 45.1% quantitative, 25% forum, 14.9% qualitative, 9.4% editor’s note, 2.3% rhetorical/critical, 1.6% mixed methods, 1% metareview, 0.3% meta-analysis, and 0.3% meta-synthesis. These findings confirm that rhetorical methods are a minority in the study of instructional

communication and prove that much instructional communication research is partial to a (post)positivist research paradigm.

Sprague (1994) advocates a shift to a communicative perspective. She contends that instructional communication research centered on looking at education communicatively can approach questions of the construction of meaning throughout the educational system. Sprague (1994) notes that “A communicative perspective commits us to keep talking to each other ... to re-examine our own constructed versions of truth” (p. 287). Likewise, Rudick (2023) asserts that instructional communication scholarship needs to understand more seriously the communicative dimensions of teaching and learning as iterative, fluctuating, and uneven processes through myriad methodological approaches. He writes:

I mean this expansively to include types such as cohort or trend design ... secondary data analysis ... auto/ethnographic study ... rhetorical criticism (e.g., analyzing the history of U.S. Department of Education’s rulings, rules, or speeches about teaching/learning), or ongoing creative/performative work... (p. 207)

While Rudick’s conception of rhetoric appears limited to written policy and public address, he at least understands that rhetorical methods can be of value to the study of instructional communication. Indeed, as K-12 and university classrooms have become sites of culture war conflict, Ledbetter (2023) notes that the field of instructional communication, fueled by a diverse set of powerful research methods, holds potential for clarifying the connection between instructional content, teacher delivery, and student learning on controversial subject matter. Because rhetorical criticism is among the diverse set of research methods, which Ledbetter describes, this dissertation project responds to an important call to expand instructional



communication scholarship through a rhetorical lens. In the following section, I offer an overview of my findings and their implications.

### **Summary of Rhetorical Analyses**

As I stated in Chapter 1, this dissertation analyzes the rhetorical discourses of three critical Black Language teacher-scholar-activists through the lens of Black prophetic rhetoric. Understanding how these rhetors employ Black prophetic rhetoric within their public pedagogies offers considerable nuance that informs and influences the way we engage in instructional contexts. I read each of these rhetors as engaging their audiences with a prophetic consciousness through prophetic discourses which challenge, charge, and critique social institutions (e.g., schools and universities) for perpetuating and sustaining anti-black linguistic racism. Each text renders a new revelation of Black prophetic rhetoric which expands the discourse on Black or African rhetorical agency in response to social injustice. In the following sections, I offer a summary of what Drs. April Baker-Bell, Jamila Lyiscott, and Anne Charity Hudley offer us by way of Black prophetic reading based on my reading of their public pedagogies.

### **Womanist Prophetic Rhetoric**

In my reading of April Baker-Bell's address, I theorize *womanist prophetic rhetoric* in the context of teaching and instruction. In conceptualizing this term, I extrapolate the specific rhetorical elements that manifest in Baker-Bell's speech where womanist and prophetic discourses meet. Womanist prophetic rhetoric considers how the womanist, or the womanist framework, strategically employs rhetorical discourses as a form of prophetic teaching. Baker-Bell's address demonstrates this framework masterfully. From her speech, I gathered that womanist prophetic involves at least seven womanist-prophetic processes. First, the womanist prophet develops a *radical subjectivity* through which she sustains a critical consciousness of

herself and systemic oppressions. Second, the womanist prophet takes on a *representative prophetic persona* through which she commits to representing a group through a prophetic discourse aimed at social justice and social change. Third, the womanist prophet is committed to *communalism* which serves as a source of ancestral knowledge but is also foundational to womanist prophetic critique as it indexes sacred rhetorics of the community the prophet represents. Fourth, the womanist prophet promotes a *love ethic* that emanates from herself and projects a radical, revolutionary love that challenges social institutions in search of liberation and justice. Fifth, the womanist prophet engages her audiences through a *rhetoric of interpellation* as it is at once invitational and constitutive. The sixth process in which the womanist prophet engages is a continuous *critical engagement* of individual, ideological, and institutional systems of oppression. And finally, the womanist prophet is a *witness* as she commits to naming violence, trauma, loss, suffering, and pain that evokes continuous critical, contemplative reflection that leads to change.

### **Black Prophetic Fugitivity**

In my reading of Jamila Lyiscott's TED talk, I theorize *Black prophetic fugitivity* as a Black magical rhetoric that advances discourses of liberation and freedom. Drawing on the rhetorical power of Black magic—the same magical energy that James Cone used to develop Black Liberation Theology—I conclude that Lyiscott takes on the rhetorical persona of the Black fugitive prophet to usher in a new dispensation of Black fugitive pedagogy. Indeed, I define the Black fugitive prophet as the type of prophetic persona in which one takes on the image of the abolitionist to (re)constitute an oppressive rhetorical situation that sustains and supports white supremacy or any other dehumanizing systems. Through this rhetorical persona, Lyiscott employs African conceptions and philosophies of rhetoric such as Nommo (the magical power of

the word) and Ma'at (Kemetite ethical and moral principles) to promote what she calls a Liberation Literacies pedagogy. In my reading of Lyiscott's talk, I situate Black prophetic fugitivity as an architectonic, constitutive rhetoric that bears witness to linguistic justice and anti-black linguistic racism in the classroom. Hence, as I have said, Lyiscott offers us a look into the Black radical tradition towards the hope embedded in Black prophetic rhetoric to encourage sustainable change through critical Black language awareness.

### **Prophetic Rehabilitation**

In my reading of Anne Charity Hudley's Duolingo talk, I theorize *prophetic rehabilitation*. I define prophetic rehabilitation as a discourse grounded in the sacred rhetorics of healing that works to restore or rehabilitate a community of people from the damage of hegemonic discourses which threaten or devalue the community's cultural identities. Drawing on the prophetic nature of the Black Lives Matter framework and the healing nature of African Diaspora Literacy, Charity Hudley engages in a prophetic discourse that aims to restore and uplift Black Language speakers (and others) through the rhetorical campaign that Black Languages Matter. From Charity Hudley's talk, I conclude that the rhetorical persona of the rehabilitating prophet administers rhetorical healing to her audience. In Charity Hudley's case, this rhetorical healing is aimed at Black and non-Black audiences who have experienced injuries on social, psychological, and ideological levels regarding their perception of Black linguistic identities. As a Black parrhesiastes, the rehabilitating prophet opens her heart to her audiences to speak truth that illumines injustice and inequity. Charity Hudley models this prophetic persona as she works to restore Black Language speakers and the celebration of their multidimensional identities. Through prophetic rehabilitation, Charity Hudley prophetically weaponizes rhetorics of healing to challenge anti-black linguistic racism.

## Major Contributions

As I state from the outset, this project is a transdisciplinary one. I approach my work through this lens, as opposed to “interdisciplinary,” intentionally. For me, interdisciplinarity looks like neighbors who speak to each other from their respective yard spaces with fences that clearly demarcate the different yard spaces. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, looks like those neighbors tearing down their fences to pursue conversation not limited to their respective yard spaces. This also applies to subdisciplinary research and scholarship. This dissertation project bears contributions that encourage such transdisciplinary conversations which can lead to increased knowledge production and social change. In this section, I discuss these contributions and their heuristic value in communication and rhetorical studies.

There are a few contributions this project makes to the communication discipline. The most salient is the increased focus on rhetoric within instructional communication. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that rhetoric has been completely ignored within instructional communication. Indeed, Farris, Houser, and Hosek (2018) note that the rhetorical tradition has often centered on instructors’ use of verbal and nonverbal messages to influence or to persuade students with the goal of either changing or reinforcing their attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors. These scholars trace the rhetorical tradition back to Aristotle whose rhetorical proofs are understood to inform instructor credibility (ethos), instructor emotional labor (pathos), and instructor clarity (logos). Farris, Houser, and Hosek (2018) conclude that, more generally, “instructors teaching from the rhetorical tradition tend to enact more linear communication models in their classrooms” (p. 7). Like the basic view of rhetoric and the rhetorical tradition these scholars discuss, this perspective offers a limited and linear understanding of how rhetoric functions in instructional contexts.

In the first place, I find the monolith of a singular rhetorical tradition marginalizing as it fixes in place the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric which has long dominated the communication discipline. Jackson and Richardson (2003) document that rhetoric must be at least 6,500 years old, since the estimated birth of human civilization has been dated at 4500 B.C. Jackson and Richardson (2003) write that “the Greek and Roman classical rhetorical paradigms can no longer occupy a restrictive space of anteriority, since there are clearly civilizations, cultures, and traditions that existed before the Greeks and Romans” (p. xv). Jackson (2003) contends that that every culture has its own unique perspective on rhetoric and that the western intellectual tradition must be decentralized so that other cultural legacies can sufficiently located within rhetorical studies. By analyzing each of my selected rhetorical texts through the lens of the Black prophetic (rhetorical) tradition, I offer a different rhetorical perspective through which to understand how rhetoric functions in teaching.

My focus on Black instructional or pedagogical rhetorics indexes the Black cultural legacy of rhetoric and its African ancestral traditions. Take, for example, my reading of April Baker-Bell’s address which reveals how womanist prophetic rhetoric can be exercised pedagogically. My analysis shows that by taking on the rhetorical persona of the womanist prophet, educators are likened to the African griot who is not just a storyteller but a truthbearer and freedom fighter. When applied to the classroom and other instructional contexts, this strategy expands the notion of rhetoric’s perceived linear communication by acknowledging the way womanist prophetic rhetoric invites students or student-audiences to participate in instructional discourses. Put another way, womanist prophetic rhetoric invites us to understand educators as not merely talking at students but inviting them to engage in critical discourses in hopes of raising their consciousness and motivating action. This complements Karenga (2003)

who asserts that African understandings of rhetoric are not limited to persuasive discourses but also involve an “exchange in good pursuit for the community and the world” (p. 11). A Black or African rhetorical perspective of instructional communication moves beyond the three modes of appeals identified in Aristotelian rhetoric (ethos, pathos, logos) because, in the Black or African rhetorical tradition, these are bound together in an inseparable unity.

As Ledbetter (2023) indicates, instructional communication research has the potential to clarify and respond to questions on controversial subject matter. By controversial subject matter, I suspect Ledbetter alludes to intersecting matters of race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and the like. Inherent in this assertion is the understanding that instructional communication has political dimensions, but as Sprague (1992) notes, there are differences in scholars who merely strive to understand these political dimensions and those who seek to make human behavior instrumental toward some productive end. Sprague echoes Charland (1990) in that critical-cultural theorists and rhetorical theorists do offer different perspectives; however, as Charland (1990) writes “a theory of discourse concerned with practical politics cannot ignore rhetoric” (p. 259). Obviously, instructional communicationists have not ignored rhetoric entirely, but by reducing the perspective and power of rhetoric to a linear mode of communication, instructional communication scholars do ignore the need for rhetorical theory in responding to controversy. Drawing on Burke’s conception of irony, Leff (1993) writes that “irony discounts any single angle of vision and keeps us in contact with the necessarily plural and relative character of the substance of human relations... Irony counteracts this reductive impulse by sustaining controversy...” (cited in de Velasco, Campbell, & Henry, 2016, p. 444). This resistance to objective or relativist proclivities is what motivates Leff (1993) to treat rhetoric as a medium that “ironically” seeks to resolve controversies for practical purposes while sustaining the ongoing

process of controversy. In other words, rhetoric is the tool with which we can critically interrogate controversial subject matter and resolve specific controversies, but rhetoric is also a lens through which we can understand the role controversies play in exacting social change at various levels.

This dissertation project offers a Black (prophetic) rhetorical perspective to instructional communication scholarship which broadens the tool kit and theoretical lens needed to grapple with controversial subject matter. For one, the Black prophetic tradition emphasizes the rhetorical agency of rhetors and their ability to not only be critics but change agents as well. This complements what Sprague (1992) says about teachers as intellectuals. She writes:

When teachers recognize that they are intellectuals, they can choose to act as transformative intellectuals ... A transformative intellectual is not merely concerned with giving students the knowledge and skills they need for economic and social mobility, but with helping them discover the moral and political dimensions of a just society *and the means to create it* (pp. 7-8, emphasis mine).

What Sprague nods at here is rhetoric's performative power within instructional contexts to discuss and dismantle injustices. The Black prophetic tradition is especially useful in promoting rhetorical performance in response to political controversies. Consider my analysis of Jamila Lyiscott's TED Talk. I argue that Lyiscott takes on the persona of the Black fugitive prophet as a strategy to promote a liberatory pedagogy. Considering the current political climate where conservatives are keen on dictating what can and cannot be discussed in the classroom, critical educators need a rhetorical strategy that enables them to respond to the political dimensions that exist among their students and among the broader publics. I imagine transformative intellectuals as critical educators who embrace the persona of a Black fugitive prophet. These educators

imagine and realize fugitive means to engage their students in critical-cultural discourses but also promote rhetorical action that leads to systemic change. In short, instructional communication cannot address controversy without rhetoric; thus, by emphasizing how Black prophetic rhetoric functions within instructional contexts, this dissertation invites a revisioning of the rhetorical perspective in instructional communication scholarship, and it encourages a revisioning of how the prophetic tradition functions in teaching and pedagogy.

### **To Da Future: Towards a Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy**

As I explained in the previous section, the rhetorical analyses which I have rendered in the body of this dissertation offer significant implications for the relationship between rhetoric and instructional communication; however, there is a much broader consideration that deserves equal attention. The contributions I discussed above focus on how my reading of selected texts expands the rhetorical perspective in instructional communication, but when taken together, my analyses reveal that prophetic rhetoric can be developed into an instructional or pedagogical framework. To be clear, the former centers instructional communication as the major event and prophetic rhetoric as a tool or lens. The latter prioritizes prophetic rhetoric as a fundamental performance which cannot be divorced from instruction or pedagogy. To this end, my readings lead us to consider a prophetic-rhetorical approach to teaching which I am calling Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy (PCP). As a frame, PCP is a liberatory pedagogic approach rooted within the Black prophetic-rhetorical tradition which combines critical analysis with rhetorical performance. While PCP can be understood as a prophetic way of teaching communication, it is important to note that this framework is much more than that. I encapsulate communication in brackets to distinguish this approach from other prophetic pedagogies, but more importantly, I do so to underscore rhetorical communication's salient contribution to instructional discourses. By



this, I suggest that too often communication and rhetoric are seen as one of many pillars used to sustain pedagogical practices. PCP draws from the well of rhetorical communication and uses Black prophetic rhetoric to advance a set of action-oriented commitments. Such commitments, as Fassett and Warren (2007) note, charge us with a sense of duty and remind us of responsibilities or promises we must keep. Based on the readings of my selected texts, I briefly discuss what I see as some fundamental commitments for prophetic [communication] educators. I then conclude with implications for future research.

**Commitment 1: Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy is Black-centric.**

PCP is Black-centric in the sense that it draws from and centers Black racial and cultural epistemology, ontology, and axiology to fashion a model of revolutionary teaching. Rooted within the Black rhetorical tradition, PCP begs the question of how Black ways of knowing, doing, and being can inspire instructional discourses not just in communication studies but across disciplines. Asante (1972) contends that “any interpretation of African rhetoric must begin at once to dispense with the notion that in all things Europe is teacher and Africa is pupil” (p. 363). This PCP framework begins with a necessary shift away from Eurocentric musings about teaching and learning and invites educators, students, and student-audiences to engage in instructional discourses that are informed and influenced by Black rhetorical theory and practice. Lucia Hawthorne (1972) writes:

There is no doubt about the fact that racism permeates every facet of black life in the United States... Necessarily then, the public address and private communication of black Americans will contain a preponderance of matters relating to experiences with racism, the results of racism, objections to racism, and attempts at stopping and combating racism. (p. 1)

Building on this rhetorical legacy, PCP maintains an orientation towards the speech of protest and resistance which constitutes a transformative language needed to facilitate strategy in response to oppression.

While PCP is Black-centric, it is not only for Black folx and is not limited to Black educators and students. Proponents of this framework either employ Black prophetic rhetoric in their teaching or emphasize its liberatory impact when applied to other cultural contexts. Still, like other critical social theories (i.e., Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality), PCP indexes a Black radical tradition that cannot be separated from its application. The rhetors from my selected texts illumine how Black prophetic rhetoric can be used to constitute a radical response to Black oppression. These Black women apply Black prophetic rhetoric to their meanings, methods, and musings to advance anti-racist, liberatory, and decolonial instructional discourses centered on Black language and literacy education. In resisting Black linguistic racism and oppression, these speakers become the archetype of a prophetic [communication] educator in that they draw from Black experiences to promote revolutionary teaching that can benefit everyone.

**Commitment 2: Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy is inherently critical.**

As I mention in Chapter 1, prophetic rhetoric is a critical discourse. Johnson (2012) argues that prophetic rhetoric acts as a social criticism because it challenges the leaders, conventions, and ritual practices of society. Johnson (2012) delineates Black prophetic rhetoric into a four-part rhetorical structure in which the third element, he says, there is a charge, challenge, critique, judgment, or warning. Because prophetic rhetoric is a fundamental component of PCP, this framework is also inherently critical. As a critical rhetorical framework, PCP invites its educators and students to critique, challenge, and counter interlocking systems of oppression in schools and society. Of course, this does not differ much from what is traditionally

understood as critical pedagogy. The difference between the two, as I imagine it, is that PCP places emphasis on rhetorical performance which can manifest in different ways.

One way that PCP emphasizes rhetorical performance is through the adoption of a prophetic persona. Prophetic [communication] educators take on a prophetic persona when engaging their students or student-audience to promote a prophetic discourse. The discourse can vary in controversial and political subject matter, as I mentioned earlier, but despite the controversy, prophetic [communication] educators consciously or unconsciously appeal to their audiences through a prophetic persona. These personae might pre-exist or might be newly invented and undocumented. In either case, the educator fashions their instructional discourse using prophetic-rhetorical strategies to challenge and critique social issues such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, and the like. Consider my reading of Ann Charity Hudley's Duolingo talk. I argue that Charity Hudley takes on the prophetic persona of the rehabilitative prophet to promote a rhetorical discourse of healing. In doing this, I read Charity Hudley as a prophetic [communication] educator because she renders a prophetic message that critiques the colonial legacy in language socialization, challenges misinformation about Black languages, and corrects these damaging discourses through rhetoric healing. While this is just one of three examples, I believe that closer observations of pedagogical practices in and out of the classroom will reveal many more examples of prophetic personae which educators employ.

Another way that PCP emphasizes rhetorical performance is through its implicit focus on praxis. Charland (1990) points out that rhetorical theory mandates a particular mode of criticism. He writes that "The rhetorical critic seeks to identify how discourse configures the world as meaningful and consequently mandates "reasonable" courses of action" (p. 257). In this way, rhetorical critics and cultural critics differ in that rhetoric begins with a concern for the potential

real effects of a discourse and considers how that discourse motivates social action. In short, rhetoric is never satisfied with mere critical discussion. Where there is good reason, rhetoric motivates action. Given this, I believe that prophetic [communication] educators do more than complicate social and political issues; rather, they inspire political action through various means. Through Black prophetic fugitivity, Jamila Lyiscott encourages teachers and students to subvert anti-black linguistic practices in schools through a Liberation Literacies pedagogy. By doing this, Lyiscott necessarily shifts from critiquing and challenging anti-black linguistic racism to promoting individual and institutional courses of action that respond to it. I believe that Lyiscott models what Sprague (1994) calls a transformative intellectual and what I am calling a prophetic [communication] educator.

**Commitment 3: Prophetic [communication] educators are committed to social justice.**

The rhetors of my selected texts share many things in common, and one of them is their fight for racial and linguistic justice. Whether through womanist prophetic rhetoric, Black prophetic fugitivity, or prophetic rehabilitation, these Black women share a commitment to dismantling anti-blackness in education. This collective agenda is at the heart of PCP. That is to say that prophetic [communication] educators are committed to social justice in and out of the classroom, and more specifically, they reinforce this commitment through instructional discourses. This commitment hinges on the former in a significant way which proves important to the formation of PCP as a pedagogical framework. Because PCP is suspended in criticism as a critical rhetorical paradigm, its proponents must always be ready to critique discourses that can be used to advance an oppressionist agenda. This includes a constant critique of PCP as well. While I believe prophetic [communication] educators are motivated by good reason, I must acknowledge that “good reason” is rhetorically ambiguous which inevitably leads to controversy

about the PCP's potential misuse. In other words, while PCP is committed to criticality, this commitment has the potential to make the framework vulnerable to misapplication. Indeed, an argument could be made that a white supremacist is motivated by good reason to promulgate instructional discourses that sustain white cultural hegemonies. The same can be said for educators who intentionally promote anti-queer discourses in their teaching. The question then becomes what distinguishes these educators from prophetic [communication] educators? The answer to this question is rooted in PCP's commitment to social justice.

Drawing from Black-African communication theory, I situate social justice within the African concept of Ma'at. Asante (2018) describes the idea of Ma'at as key to understanding order, balance, truth, justice, harmony, and reciprocity in human interactions. He contends that Ma'at is the essence of communication. Indeed, Asante (2012) writes that:

The aim in communication is always to overcome *isfet*, i.e., that which is evil, difficult, disharmonious and troublesome. What we observe with the practice of Maat is the inevitability of good overcoming evil, of harmony replacing disharmony, and of order taking the place of disorder. This was an optimistic view of reality where the belief was that justice would always rise to the top and that truth would outlast untruth.

Ma'at helps shape PCP's commitment to social justice, for through this African cosmology, prophetic [communication] educators employ prophetic-rhetorical strategies that work to overcome *isfet*. In other words, Ma'at becomes the litmus test by which PCP is evaluated and critically engaged. Those educators who fall short of Ma'at cannot be said to espouse prophetic [communication] pedagogy as the *isfet* they promote within their instructional discourses does not reflect the sacred pursuit of justice. I discuss Ma'at in chapter 3 in my reading of Lyiscott's TED talk arguing that she rhetorically invokes the spirit of Ma'at as a way of challenging her

audience to consider the kind of speech they practice in the classroom. I could apply this concept to Baker-Bell and Charity Hudley as well because the anti-oppressionist discourses implicit in their public pedagogies advance the commitment to racial and linguistic justice. Hence, the “good reason” that motivates prophetic [communication] educators is tempered by a Ma’at-centered justice that is always in constant opposition with injustice.

**Commitment 4: Prophetic [communication] educators bear witness.**

For the prophetic [communication] educator, teaching or instruction serves as an instrument to “cry aloud and spare not” the myriad injustices that befall the oppressed. In doing this, these educators draw on the prophetic-rhetorical strategy of witnessing. As I discuss in chapter 2, rhetorical witnessing is especially important when testifying of spoken and unspoken truths. Flynn and Allen (2020) write that rhetorical witnessing “does the crucially important work of investigating pain, suffering, loss, trauma, resilience, testimony and, ultimately, social change and subjective reconstitution” (p. 369). These scholars argue that bearing witness is rhetorical action in search of a shared world. Indeed, Allen (2021) writes that “Bearing witness always occurs for audiences that are multiple and divided” (p. 61). Hence, bearing witness is a rhetorical imperative for those who embrace the prophetic, as bearing witness challenges the rhetor to unify their audience through prophetic-discursive means. As Darsey (1997) writes:

The message of the[se] rhetor[s], then, is largely determined; in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “A voice says, ‘Cry!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ The radical, like the prophet, is dedicated, the proclaimer of a divine and sacred principle. The radical bears witness.

For Darsey, the radical and the prophet are equal. In his estimation, the radical prophet bears witness because it is their sacred duty to testify on behalf of those who no longer have voice and

for those whose voices are either unheard or ignored. What, then, does this mean for the prophetic [communication] educator?

For proponents of PCP, bearing witness means raising consciousness. Johnson (2012) notes that in the second component of prophetic rhetoric's rhetorical structure, there is an element of consciousness-raising through a sharing or announcement of the real situation. The prophetic [communication] educator is committed to bearing witness as it is a critical and rhetorical response to oppression and injustice. This pedagogic practice involves more than talking about controversial issues; rather, I understand it as the sacred discourse of the radical prophet through which they acknowledge the pain, suffering, loss, and resilience of a people in hopes of effecting social change. Hence, while bearing witness is their sacred duty, the prophetic [communication] educator understands their message is community-focused and is a necessary rhetorical action aimed at a shared awareness of oppressive and unjust issues. I should stress that this unifying effort is an aim, and while persuasion is an inherent element in this process, persuasion is not the goal. As Allen (2021) writes, bearing witness or "testimony opens space for becoming-together even where it cannot substantially unify across entrenched divisions or heal persistent harms" (p. 61). In other words, the prophetic [communication] educator understands that not everyone they address can or will be persuaded; still, their sacred duty compels them to bear witness continuously as this rhetorical action says to the oppressed— "We see you."

I focus more attention on rhetorical witnessing in chapter 2 in my analysis of Baker-Bell's address; however, all the rhetors whose texts I have analyzed in this project bear witness to the egregious injustice of anti-black linguistic racism in different ways. Through womanist prophetic rhetoric, Baker-Bell calls her audience to remember Black suffering and pain in a critical way which creates the space for contemplative reflection regarding anti-black violence in

and out of the classroom. In asserting that “We BEEN knowin,” she bears witness to linguisticism exacted upon Black Languages speakers in schools and society. Lyiscott takes on the persona of the Black fugitive prophet to challenge articulate powers that threaten the legitimacy of Black languages in society, especially in the classroom. She bears witness to Black Language speakers whose perceived inarticulate-magic-rhetoric-power is obscured by racist-classist language practices. Finally, Charity Hudley uses prophetic healing as a rhetorical strategy to bear witness to the historical, cultural, and political violence against Black languages throughout the Black or African diaspora. In doing so, she projects unequivocally that Black languages are not broken or monolithic; rather, they are beautiful displays of racial and cultural history, legacy, and identity. So, in their distinctive ways, these rhetors bear witness on behalf of Black speech communities to say not only that “We see you” but that “We hear you” too.

**Commitment 5: Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy is a pedagogy of hope.**

Consistent with the rhetorical structure of prophetic rhetoric, PCP maintains a commitment to hope. Indeed, Johnson (2012) contends that in prophetic rhetoric the speaker offers encouragement and hope to their audience. This is to say that prophetic rhetoric and this prophetic pedagogical paradigm are incomplete until the rhetor offers a vision of a better future. This can be done through idealistic or action-oriented means. For example, the speaker might express visions of futurity in which justice is served, or they might introduce one or more actionable solutions to address or resolve injustice. In either case, the prophetic [communication] educator offers hope to their students or student-audience. This hope is what Cornel West (2004) calls a tragicomic hope. He writes:

This black American interpretation of tragicomic hope is rooted in a love of freedom. It proceeds from a free inquisitive spirit that highlights imperial America's weak will to



racial justice ... It yields a courage to hope for betterment against the odds without a sense of revenge or resentment. It revels in a dark joy of freely thinking, acting, and loving under severe constraints of unfreedom.

Because PCP is Black-centric, it makes sense that its commitment to hope is rooted in Black struggles for justice. This perspective on hope acknowledges the difficulties that oppressed people face while maintaining a resolution to overcome them. As Freire (1997) writes, “critical acceptance of my inconclusion immerses me in permanent search. What makes me hopeful is not so much the certainty of the find, but my movement in search. It is not possible to search without hope” (p. 59). Hope, then, is about one’s process or journey to liberation or freedom (Smith, 2021). The task of the prophetic [communication] educator is to facilitate this prophetic hope through instructional discourses which can be done in many ways.

In chapter 2, Baker-Bell offers hope through her womanist prophetic rhetoric. Specifically, she does this through her emphasis on revolutionary and redemptive love. As I state, Baker-Bell offers a womanist approach to prophetic rhetoric that stresses the need for an inward redeeming love that creates the space for a transformative, revolutionary love. Such love precedes and makes way for prophetic hope. What Baker-Bell models for the prophetic [communication] educator is the need to critically love oneself which means pressing into and beyond one’s oppressive state—as the oppressed or the oppressor. Only then can prophetic [communication] educators offer hope to students because they become the rhetorical embodiment of hope.

In chapter 3, Lyiscott offers hope through her Black fugitive prophetic rhetoric. The very notion of Black fugitivity bears with it hopeful anticipation or expectation for freedom. In my reading, I note that Lyiscott stresses the need to (re)imagine the classroom space and, ultimately,

the world, to consider the magic rhetoric of Black fugitivity as a generative power in instructional discourse. Lyiscott teaches the prophetic [communication] educator that a constant pursuit of hope for fugitive teachers and learners rests in the imagination, or rhetorical invention. That is to say that prophetic [communication] educators rhetorically (re)imagine ways that liberatory practices can subvert oppressive structures in education and schooling.

In chapter 4, Charity Hudley offers hope through her rhetoric of prophetic rehabilitation. As I mentioned, Charity Hudley renders a sort of rhetorical healing to her audience which invites them to rethink and divorce colonial ideologies about language and to pursue a more equitable future with a renewed hope in Black cultural-linguistic identity. Once again, hope is embedded in a prophetic instruction discourse. Indeed, prophetic rehabilitation does not function without hope. Hence, what Charity Hudley demonstrates for the prophetic [communication] educator is how prophetic-rhetorical healing renders hope and encouragement to students and student-audiences who are knowingly and unknowingly harmed by racist-classist-heteronormative-patriarchal-ableist ideologies.

### **Conclusion and Hopes for Future Research**

It has been said that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. In my earlier research, I came to understand teaching as a form of prophesying and pedagogy as a form of prophecy which reinforces the belief that teaching not only informs students but changes them as well (Smith, 2020). Drawing from Johnson (2012), I came to understand teaching as a prophetic rhetoric that “transforms the audience into redefining and reshaping their situations and even themselves. It allows the audience to see themselves in a different light ... to reclaim agency and create spaces to act and, more importantly, to be” (p. 4). I believed this to be prophetic teaching, but I have since learned that prophetic teaching, like other models of instruction, requires

constant and consistent revisioning. As McLaren and Dantley (1990) contend, to advance a more equitable and transformative form of teaching, “we educators must reject the fixity and hideboundness of present pedagogical approaches which transform us into custodians of sameness” (p. 42). Thus, this dissertation research constitutes the first step of a long journey in framing how Black prophetic rhetoric functions in teaching and instruction.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this dissertation is how rhetoric functions in teaching and instruction in multidimensional ways which provides text and context that communication scholars—instructionists, rhetoricians, or otherwise—should explore more closely. Particularly, I stress how Black or African American prophetic rhetoric can be applied to instructional discourses. In doing so, I challenge the canon of scholarship regarding the Black prophetic tradition to consider pedagogical texts in addition to traditional artifacts such as political and preaching oratory. My analysis of April Baker-Bell’s address encourages researchers and practitioners to consider how womanist prophetic rhetoric functions in pedagogic practices. Likewise, my reading of Jamila Lyiscott’s TED talk invites scholars to imagine what it might mean to embrace Black prophetic fugitivity in a time where culturally relevant teaching is under attack. Finally, my chapter on Ann Charity Hudley’s Duolingo talk challenges teacher-scholars to reflect on prophetic rehabilitation as a form of rhetorical healing in and out of the classroom. These Black women model and demonstrate what it means to possess a prophetic consciousness in teaching—what it means to be a prophetic [communication] educator.

I believe the development of Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy bears significant contributions for instructional communication and rhetorical studies. However, there is much more to be discovered. For instance, I believe that PCP could be useful to scholars and practitioners in education studies, gender and women’s studies, racial and ethnic studies, and

queer studies just to name a few. Future research in this area and with this framework encourages scholars to consider how a critical, Black-centric, justice-focused paradigm can be employed to bear witness through instructional discourses (broadly defined) and to offer hope to myriad student-audiences. This framework calls teacher-scholars to return to rhetoric's pedagogic focus in which action and performance are defining elements. As we prepare future generations of teachers and learners, there must be an emphasis on rhetorical performance which equips educators and students with the communicative resources needed to critique and respond to social and political controversies in effective and meaningful ways. As a critical-rhetorical framework, Prophetic [Communication] Pedagogy is continuous in the sense that it is always open to revision. As times and circumstances change, I am certain that the prophetic-rhetorical focus at the center of this framework will guide teacher-scholars towards necessary action. For as Baker-Bell, Lyiscott, and Charity Hudley have taught me, prophetic [communication] educators will always find a way to bear witness.

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## APPENDIX A

### **We Been Knowin': Toward an Antiracist Language & Literacy Education** **April Baker-Bell**

All right, so thanks for the introduction, and thank you all for being here with me today. So, I want to start off by thanking Tam and thanking Stacia for bringing us together for the critical—this critical and necessary gathering focused on doing the work to enact change in language and literacy education. Indeed, we have a lot of work to do.

So before going further I want to acknowledge the Cherokee and Muscogee nations—the indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands the University of Georgia now stands. Land acknowledgments are powerful and important statements that allow for us to respect and to affirm ongoing relationships between indigenous people in the land, but I also recognize that colonialism is a current, ongoing process, and we need to be mindful of our current participation.

In this way, land acknowledgments are only meaningful when they are coupled with sustained relationships with indigenous communities and community informed actions and continuous awareness of the indigenous histories, perspectives, and experiences that are often suppressed and forgotten. In offering this land acknowledgement, I hope that this is part of the collective work that is being done here in Georgia and in the nation to change how we see land, how we talk about land, and how we see ourselves in relation to the goals of the indigenous nations.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the work of two black women scholars who I've had the pleasure of having as students—Suban Nur Cooley and Shawanda Legarre—who reminds us to acknowledge our own place in the story of colonization and of undoing its legacy. In particular, Suban writes:

“we cannot move forward without acknowledging the histories of those connected to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in this space ... the relations we're forming here today are built upon the violent history of relations that were occupied, moved, and removed – and this colonial impact is interwoven into this fabric- in the fabric of this nation, this space, and this moment.”

As a Black language and literacy scholar, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my ancestors' relationship with language and land. Five hundred years ago, European and slavers and African middlemen raided villages and homes in various parts of Africa to abduct African people for the transatlantic slave trade. In addition to kidnapping, beating, abusing, and sexually exploiting African people, enslavers used language planning as a tool to separate captive Africans who spoke the same language as a way to minimize rebellion. Women, men, and children were separated from their loved ones and loaded onto slave ships and leaving behind their freedom, their humanity, their homelands, their families, their cultural traditions, and their languages.

After a traumatic journey from West Africa to the new world, enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage arrived to the Caribbean, the Americas, and various parts of Europe chained together without a shared language to communicate with one another or the ability to communicate in their oppressor's language. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks



thinks about the trauma enslaved Africans must have felt about the loss of their language and the terrifying sound of the English language. She writes:

“I think now of the grief of displaced homeless Africans, forced to inhabit a world where they saw folks like themselves, inhabiting the same skin, in the same condition, but who had no shared language to talk with one another who needed the oppressor’s language ... when I imagine the terror of Africans on board slave ships, on auction blocks, inhabiting the unfamiliar architecture of plantations, I consider that this terror is extended beyond fear of punishment, that it also resided also in the anguish of hearing a language that they could not comprehend.”

In addition to linguistic isolation, enslaved Africans who were dispersed in the United States were intentionally denied access to literacy by law. Still, they needed to learn the language of this land to help them build the physical, cultural, and intellectual foundations of this nation. Despite losing contact with their native language and it being illegal to teach them to read and write, enslaved Africans created a language out of the remnants of their mother tongues and pieces and parts of the English language. This language not only provided a way for enslaved Africans to communicate among each other, but it also provided the means to communicate that would not be fully understood by their own oppressors.

Fast forward to today. Black children are being penalized for using a counterlanguage, counter-literacies, and counterstories that our ancestors were forced to create. This is the emphasis of this presentation.

The title of my talk “‘We Been Knowin’: Toward an Antiracist Language and Literacy Education” is inspired by Tam and Stacia’s invitation to each of us to create and share different pathways for justice in an unjust world through language and literacy education. I titled this talk “‘We Been Knowin’...” to suggest that we've been knowin what to do to move toward an anti-racist language and literacy education. The real question is what are we waiting on to do the work. “‘We been knowin’...” also signifies that communities of color especially Black women, women of color, queer and trans people been knowin what has and has not worked by way of our lived experiences and has continuously taught us how to think about freedom, collective liberation, and have built a foundation for what must be done today.

The picture on this slide was taken by a photographer in the 50s, and I think it aligns perfectly with my title. I mean if you look at their faces in the centers; the visual is saying we told y'all we been knowin.

I'm a storyteller—a Black feminist-womanist storyteller. Elaine Richardson reminds us that storytelling remains one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that black women use to convey our special knowledge. Throughout this talk, I will tell you stories about histories, personal encounters, my teaching and research experiences as a way to reflect on what has been and what is now in language and literacy education and the urgent need for an anti-racist literacy and language education. These stories will not be told linearly because as my colleague Lamar Johnson says black people's past, present and future selves are always in conversation with one another. I also want to add a disclaimer that although my talk will reflect black people's epistemologies and language and literacy practices, I want to point out that systems of oppression that perpetuate anti-blackness are interconnected with and cannot be separated from

how other communities of color experience racism, systemic injustice, and inequities. I believe in Charlene Carruthers's thinking that it is an aspiration and liberatory politic that black folks must take up for the sake of our own collective liberation and acts the basic notion that none of us will be free unless all of us are free. Sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and other forms of oppression do not serve our collective liberation, so this has to be included in our struggle. This suggests that the fight for antiracist language and literacy education has to be intersectional, so I'm going to do three things with this talk. I'm going to talk about when and where and how I entered this work, community-based critical race media literacies, and I'm gonna talk about antiracist black language pedagogies.

So, the theme for this conference inspired me to deeply reflect and think about when, where and how I enter language in literacy education. This reflecting took me back to what bell hooks once said about for black folks teaching and educating are fundamentally political because it is rooted in the antiracist struggle. My scholarly career is rooted in my multiple identities that I occupy and the stories that contextualize my family's history with racial violence and oppression. My paternal great-grandparents migrated from Detroit in the 1950s to escape the racial terror and violence that they endured in the south. My great-uncle once shared a story with me about my great-grandparents bringing him home from a hospital in Tennessee and they noticed that someone in a maternity ward wrote nigger baby on his buttocks. My parents' educational experiences were negatively impacted by racial integration. As elementary school students, my parents were bused to predominantly white schools and taught by teachers who reinforced racial stereotypes and upheld racial assumptions of black intellectual inferiority. These intensely negative racial experiences eventually led to both of my parents leaving school and not graduating.

Many of you may know Rodney King but most people don't know about Malice Green. In November of 1992, I remember being awakened by my father's reaction to the brutal murder of Malice Green at the hands of two white police officers. I can still visualize the angry tears rolling down my father's face as he called the Detroit Police Department at least 10 times to protest and condemn them for their actions. I recall returning to my middle school the next day looking for an opportunity to process Malice Green's murder, my father's rage, police brutality, and what it meant to be black in that social and historical context. Not surprising, all of my teachers were silent about this incident as if schools and literacy learning stood on outside of racial violence.

My family's history with racial violence and oppression shaped how I see the world, and their stories and actions taught me how to speak back to and against racial injustice. This is what inspired me to become a teacher. When I began my teaching career as a high school English language arts teacher on the eastside of Detroit, I wanted to give my students the kind of racial literacies and awareness that my family provided me with. I wanted to enact what bell hooks describes as a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance—a way of thinking about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom. But my motivation and inspiration to enact a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance did not coincide with the preparation, or lack thereof, that I received from my English education program. I would have never imagined that my training would contribute to me reproducing the same racial and linguistic inequities I was hoping to dismantle. Don't get me wrong, the black youth I had a pleasure of working with in Detroit they were brilliant, but I did not have the language to name the kind of linguistic and racial violence and inequities they

were experiencing nor did I have the tools to speak back to anti-blackness that was embedded in a curriculum, my instruction, [and] the school practices and policies.

I then turned to my career as a language and literacy researcher with questions about how I could produce anti-racist scholarship, praxis, and knowledge that worked for transformation and social change. How can language and literacy research and teaching work against racial cultural linguistic inequities? What do racial and linguistic justice look like in language and literacy education? How can theory, research, and practice operate in tandem in the pursuit of justice?

So I want to take you all back to February, 26 2012. How many of you remember this date? All right, so let me remind you all. <insert video footage: “Trayvon Martin’s Death Changed America (Rest in Power)”>

So, the urgent need for an anti-racist language and literacy education became more clear to me following the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin. During this time, I was witnessing the ways in which black people were using these kind of critical race media literacies and digital activism to disrupt the media's role in anti-black racism, racial violence, and the maintenance of white supremacy. I noticed this as I was trying to learn more about the circumstances surrounding Trayvon's death. I recall reading mainstream media news stories and social media posts that portrayed Trayvon as a thug, a criminal, a troublemaker who got what he deserved. I was seeing the ways in which the child was being put on trial basically for his own death before I had an opportunity to learn about what actually led to his death. I remember seeing compromising photos, some that were not actual pictures of Trayvon like the one highlighted in a red box floating across social media that criminalized him and suggested that he was the cause of his own death. Kirsten West Savali maintains that contemporary media culture force feeds the American people a diet of stereotypes, misperceptions over criminalizing and marginalizing of black Americans through language, images, and omissions.

At the same time, I was witnessing black youth and other youth of color use critical race media literacies grounded in their community's knowledges to counter and rewrite these damaging narratives that were being used to project Trayvon and by extension other black boys as dangerous others. For example, I learned about the activist group[s] Black Youth Project and Dream Defenders whose counter stories and analysis exposed the critical role that media plays in the debasement of black humanity, utter indifference to black suffering, and a denial of black people's right to exist. I also watched black twitter become a powerful voice and new form of social activism for black people. Social justice driven hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #AmINext #ShutItDown, and #ICannotBreathe were being used to control our narrative, control our images, produce counter narratives, express our opinions, voice our concerns, and locate more reliable news and information about the black community. Movements like Black Lives Matter should serve as a radical wake-up call to language and literacy educators of the kinds of anti-racist critical media literacies and digital activism that many black students bring with them to the classroom, yet too often our critical media pedagogy or just literacy in general overlook the critical media literacy practice that youth are already engaging and that speak back to the agents and forces within media that work to stigmatize, characterize, and marginalize them by projecting them as dangerous others.

Following the death of Sandra Bland in 2015, activist Maisha Johnson created a blog “Eight Ways the Media Upholds White Privilege and Demonize People of Color” that uses community based critical race media literacies to counter the master narratives that mainstream media uses to construct and oppress people of color. She starts a blog off with “Are y'all paying attention to how the media gives you information?” Next, she provides patterns and examples of how mainstream media humanize white people while vilifying people of color; for example, if you look at the second one here, she talks about compromising photos that are used of black victims. She showed how mainstream media is biased when it comes to the kinds of photos to portray black victims in comparison to white the white victims and criminals. She states when the victim or criminal is white, the media tends to use photos and paint a positive picture of the victim’s life. In the case of black victims, however, media outlets tend to use compromising and damaging photos. A third one– another example is the double standard when it comes to mainstream media depictions of justice movements. As illustrated during the Ferguson and Baltimore uprisings, many mainstream media outlets describe protesters as thugs and animals who participate in looting and destroy their communities. These same adjectives and verbal markers are not typically coupled with white people who engage in riots following sporting events and festivities and at some of our universities.

So, many of you may remember Bree Newsome, who is an artist and activist, who drew national attention in 2015 when she climbed the flagpole in front of a South Carolina Capitol building and lowered the Confederate battle flag. So last year, I was following her tweets after the New Zealand Mosque attacks where she was clearly teaching the people about the urgency of critical race media literacies by challenging and resisting societal narratives that perpetuate whiteness and uphold white supremacy. So I'll share a bit of what she said. She said notice how whenever a Muslim commits a terrorist act the white political class and news media immediately make it a referendum on the religion of Islam and millions of Muslims but when a white nationalist murders people and write a manifesto no one interrogate the notion of whiteness. We are taught to view the daily violence of white supremacy as normal, so when the incident occurs in New Zealand we have to pretend that it is totally different and disconnected from things like racist police violence, racial segregation, racist policies, and racism itself.

Here's the thing, we've been knowin about the media's agenda for black folk. Indeed our ancestors and elders taught us long ago [that] the media ain't never loved us.

These critical race media literacy practices that we are seeing with black youth today are part of our ancestral memory and knowledge of our predecessors. Historically, media has been instrumental and reinforcing anti-black racism and maintaining white supremacy. As bell hooks argues, the institutionalization of white supremacy via mass media of specific images, representations of race, [and] of blackness support and maintain the oppression and exploitation over all domination of black people. Long before white supremacist ever reached the shores of what we now call the United States, they constructed images of blackness and black people to uphold and affirm our notions of racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave. From slavery on, white supremacist have recognized that the control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.

The black community have long cultivated a deep and thoroughgoing skepticism regarding traditional news narratives; for example, Malcolm X warned in 1964 that the press is irresponsible; it will make the criminal look like she's the victim and make the victim look like she's the criminal. This reversal was evident in the cases of George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin in 2012, Darren Wilson and Mike Brown in 2014, Brian Encinia and Sandra Bland in 2015. Hence, constructing images that promote racial inferiority contributes to the lack of empathy for black life. Because of this lack of empathy, society becomes desensitized to black suffering and black humanity. The desensitization of brutal violence and death of black people such as seeing video clips on social media of those who were murdered in real time like LaQuan McDonald, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castillo become part of the normal order of business. Undoubtedly, these dehumanizing portrayals for black people in the media are part of a historical lineage that continues to support a white supremacist agenda that leads to anti-blackness.

So, as I close this section, I'm just gonna throw out two questions: how do language and literacy educators learn from the already existing critical race media literacies that students bring with them to our classrooms? how can we create space in our disciplinary discourse, curricular choices, and pedagogical practices for critical media educators who exist outside of the confines of literacy teacher education? <insert video footage: "3 Ways to Speak English" by Jamila Lyiscott)>

All right, [[oh y'all can clap]] soo I mean how many of y'all know that Black Language or Ebonics or African American English is a rule-based linguistic system that includes features of West African languages has roots as deep and grammar as consistent as Scottish Irish and other world Englishes? All right, well despite there being decades of research on Black Language, its survival since enslavement, and its linguistic imprint on the nation and globe, black people and black language scholars keep having to remind language and literacy educators that it is a legit language. James Baldwin said it best in the New York Times in 1979 if black english isn't a language then tell me what is.

So, I had the privilege of growing up in a D and that's Detroit. To some of y'all, I think Dallas [[call it the D, but you know...]]. So my mother tongue Black Language was the dominant language that I heard spoken in my community. I have always marveled at the way black people in my community would talk that talk. From signifying to habitual 'be' to call-and-response, my linguistic community had a way of using language that was powerful, colorful, and unique. My mother still remains my favorite linguistic role model. As a young girl, I would try on my mother's speech styles and conversations with my siblings, friends, or instances where I needed to protect myself and others. This language— this Black Language is the language that nurtured and socialized me to understand the world and how to participate in it. Morgan (?) emphasizes the importance of the mother tongue. She says that it is the first language learned as an infant, child, and youth. It is the first source to impart knowledge and insight about language and culture.

Growing up, I was fascinated with black language and culture. I would often write stories, poems, and cards that were flavored with black language. When I was younger, I made my siblings play school, and yeah I was the teacher. My young teachings incorporated writings by

black authors like Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, and Amiri Baraka. In middle school, I created my own family newsletter that was modeled after *JET* and *Word Up!* magazines. Black language was never a place of struggle for me. I don't recall any memories of being personally corrected by teachers or my parents telling me to code-switch for opportunity or success, though I would peep my mom and dad changing their voices on the phone to try to sound more white when they were conducting business.

During my junior year of high school, I remember catching wind of the Oakland Ebonics Controversy which created tension with the black community about the way we talk. I recall overhearing my math teacher criticize black language by referring to it as poor grammar and ignorant. My parents took a different stance on the issue. They were sick and tired of the relentless shaming of black people—the way we talk, the way we walk, the way we dress, the way we eat, and the way we live. I was personally unbothered by the debate and the demeaning messages about a language that my lived experiences had already validated. Black language for me has always reflected black people's ways of knowing, interpreting, surviving, and being in the world.

Throughout my work and within this presentation, I deliberately use terms like Black Language and white mainstream English to not uphold a linguistic binary but to foreground a relationship between language, race, anti-black racism, and white linguistic supremacy.

Smitherman describes black language as a style of speaking English words with black flavor with Africanized semantic grammatical and pronunciation and rhetorical patterns. Black language comes out of the experience of U.S. slave descendants. This shared experience has resulted in common language practices in the black community. The roots of African American speech lie in a counter language to resistance discourse that was created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class.

I use white mainstream English to emphasize how standard English gets racialized as white, and although this is the standard that is used in many classrooms against which black students and other students of color are measured, as literacy researchers and educators we been knowin' that linguist maintain that the idea of a standardized language is hypothetical and socially constructed, so why do we continue to let this drive our disciplinary discourses? Indeed, what we consider standard English is mostly accepted as being proper and correct, but if you ask anyone to define or describe it, many would define it using arbitrary ideas that reflect language superiority. Sociolinguists have long argued that so-called standard English reflects and legitimizes white male upper middle class mainstream ways of speaking English. The concept of whiteness is important in understanding the silent and invisible ways in which white mainstream English serves as the unstated norm in our classrooms and would extend to our research. Alim and Smitherman argues that whites can exercise power through overt and covert racist practices. The fact that it is the language and communicative norms of those in power in any society that tend to be labeled standard official normal, appropriate, respectful, and so on often goes unrecognized particularly by members of the dominating group. In our case, white mainstream English and white ways of speaking become 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.

It was through my research with black youth in Detroit that compelled me to begin using these terms because they more explicitly capture the intersections between language and race. By linking the racial classifications black and white to language, I am challenging us to see how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected—that is, people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences. Indeed, the way black language is devalued in our classroom reflects how black lives are devalued in the world. Similarly, the way white mainstream English is privileged and deemed the norm in our classrooms is directly connected to the invisible ways that white culture is deemed normal, neutral, and superior in the world.

I use Black Language intentionally in my scholarship to acknowledge Africologist theories that maintain that black speech is the continuation of African in an American context. Africologists argue that black language is a language in its own right that includes features of West African languages, and it is not just a set of deviations from the English language. I use black language politically in my scholarship to align with the mission of black liberation movements like Black Lives Matter because no doubt the anti-blackness that is used to diminish black language and black students in classrooms is not separate from the rampant and deliberate anti-black racism and violence inflicted upon black people in society. Like the mission of Black Lives Matter, I see linguistic justice, which is the title of my forthcoming book, as a call to action—a call to radically imagine and create a world free of anti-blackness; a call to create an education system where black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, and their resistance matters.

Black language is the rhetoric of his resistance embedded in the hashtag Black Lives Matter which led to the birth of what some called the 21st century civil rights movement. It is the phonology and grammatical structure former President Barack Obama used when declining to accept change from a black cashier by saying “Nah, we straight.” Black language is the controversial words of wisdom that Michelle Obama shared at the 2016 Democratic National Convention “when they go low, we go high.” It is the blackness reflected in a style of speech that woke CNN political commentator and NPR political analyst Angela Rai unabashedly and unapologetically uses on national news to clap back and break down racial oppression for the people in the back. Black language is the linguistic inventiveness and signification in the infamous three words “reclaiming my time” that Maxine Waters used to drag U.S. Treasury Secretary. It is the rhetorical strategies that Tiana Smalls, a black woman, used to prevent Border Patrol officers from illegally searching a Greyhound bus and demanding that passengers show their documentation. Black language is also the native language and rich linguistic resources that so many black students bring to classrooms every day.

But let us not forget black language is also the language that continuously get appropriated, exploited, and colonized. Since I began my research in 2008, I've collected numerous examples of what I'm calling black linguistic appropriation and the ways that black language and literacies have become capitalized on.

Some of the recent examples include the 2017 Mtn. Dew commercial that use rappers Fat Joe, Remy Ma, and French Montana song “I'm All the Way Up” to promote their product [and] in Party City's 2018 commercial using rapper DMX's song “Party Up in Here” to promote their

unicorn party theme. Mars Incorporated also used the black lexical slang item cray-cray to personalize their sneaker rappers in 2015. MTV culturally appropriated black language in an article written in 2016 by encouraging its mostly white viewers to stop using black slang words that were used in 2015 and start using the popular black slang words that were being used in 2016. I even have to call out one of my favorite grocers, Trader Joe's, for using 'oh snap' to advertise their asparagus. Many fashion designers have capitalized on black language to create market messages to invite consumers to buy their products, and I cannot tell you how many times I've walked into retail stores to see t-shirts, mugs, hats, and pillows that have capitalized and appropriated black language.

Yet, as my research shows, in classrooms black language is devalued and viewed as a symbol of linguistic inferiority, so essentially what this says is it is acceptable for black language to be used and capitalized on by non-native black language speakers for marketing and for play, but it is unacceptable for black people to use it as a linguistic resource in classrooms and communities. This is unfortunate but unsurprising because black language is one of those features of black culture that white America loves to hate yet loves to take.

I did not develop a full understanding of language politics until I started teaching in Detroit which is really a mess when you think about it because of the legacy of Geneva Smitherman's pioneering work on black language in Detroit and around the world. Also some of the most influential black language research happened in Detroit, and the landmark 1977 Ann Arbor Black English case took place in Ann Arbor, Michigan only an hour from where I grew up in Detroit. There really is not a legit reason why teachers should be unaware and ill-prepared to address black language in their classrooms, but here we are. This is why my call for linguistic justice is personal. I see my work as an opportunity to speak to my 22 year old self, a young black teacher who wanted to enact bell hooks's revolutionary pedagogy of resistance.

Just like most black people who lived in a D, the students I worked with communicated in black language as their primary language. It was reflected in their speech and in their writing. On the one hand, as a speaker of black language myself, I recognized that my students were communicating in a language that was valid and necessary at home, in school and, on a block, but what I was receiving was pressure from school administrators to get the students to use the language of school. I personally found this problematic given that the language arts methods that I received from my teacher ed program catered to native speakers of white mainstream English and assumed every child entered English language arts classroom spoke this way. At that time, I did not have the language to name the white linguistic hegemony that was embedded in our disciplinary discourses, pedagogical practices, and theories of language nor did I have the tools to engage my students in critical conversations about what I'm calling anti-black linguistic racism. I can still recall having a conversation with students in my class about code-switching when one of them flat out said "what I would like using standard English, it don't even sound right." My own cultural competence in black as a black language speaker knew my students were speaking nothing but the truth, but as a classroom teacher, I was ill-equipped to address the critical linguistic issues that they were raising.



Now, let me contextualize my teaching and research experiences within the history of black language education to paint an even more problematic picture of the injustice and oppression that my research and forthcoming book is part of dismantling.

So you all are probably familiar with Carter G. Woodson quote in 1933. He said “In the study of languages schools pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect at some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue—in short, to understand their own linguistic history which is certainly more important for them than the study of French phonetics or historical Spanish grammar.”

In 1981, Toni Morrison wrote “It's terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses come 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 fall out with racism.”

And in 1996, [Geneva] Smitherman wrote “we have kids in the inner cities who are verbal geniuses but we call them deficient in school and attempt to eradicate a part of their identity.”

And let us not forget about that landmark 1977 Ann Arbor black english case where a federal judge ruled that by not taking black students' language into consideration teachers were contributing to the failure of black students.

I am also reminded of the Students Rights to Their Own Language Resolution that members of this field wrote in 1974.

By viewing the issues addressed in my research through a historical lens, we are able to see that little has changed over the last 85 years regarding the language education of black students. Indeed, the linguistic injustice toward black students continues.

In general, black language has not mattered in English language arts classrooms which is ironic since language arts indicate that our ELA classroom should focus on the arts of language and in black language ain't an art form, then you gotta tell me what is. Furthermore, given decades of research on the black speech community and black language once being the most studied and written about language in the world, one would assume that black students' language and literacy practices would have been embraced as a resource for educational innovation in classrooms. However, critical language scholars and critical language and literacy scholars have consistently argued that literacy educators must shift their pedagogy and practices to support the rich linguistic resources that black students and other students of color bring with them to classrooms, yet many classrooms continue to be informed by anti-black deficit theories and monolingual ideologies that view black language as a barrier to black students literacy education.

The only thing worse than black students' experience an anti-black linguistic racism in classrooms is when they internalize it. When black students' language practices are suppressed in classrooms or they begin to absorb messages that imply that black language is deficient, wrong, and unintelligent, this could cause them to internalize anti-blackness and develop negative

attitudes about their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities and about themselves. As with internalized racism, students who absorb negative ideologies about their native language may develop a sense of linguistic inferiority and lose confidence in the learning process, their own abilities, their educators, and school in general.

My work with black language speaking students over the last ten years has led to me thinking about the relationship between anti-blackness and language which I'm now referring to as anti-black linguistic racism. This picture is the— that's the cover of my book, and it was painted by Grace Player, who is a literacy scholar in this field. Many of the black students I've worked with often held perspectives that reinscribed a linguistic and racial hierarchy that positioned black language and blackness as inferior and white mainstream English and whiteness as superior thus reinforcing whiteness the anti-blackness. For instance, black students would often associate smart and good with white linguistic and cultural norms, yet they would use words and images such as disrespectful, thug, ghetto, bad trouble, skip school, and gets back grades with black linguistic and cultural norms. As difficult as it is to hear black students reinforce anti-blackness and anti-black linguistic racism, their perspectives are to be expected according to bell hooks who argued that black people are socialized within a white supremacist society, white supremacist educational system, and racist mass media that teaches us to internalize racism by convincing us that our lives, culture, language, literacies, histories, and experiences are simple and unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection. This often leads to black people unconsciously and sometimes consciously constructing images of ourselves through the lens of white supremacy; hence, it is not that black students inherently believe that their language, their culture, and race are deficient or that black people are intellectually and morally inferior; their responses more accurately reflect an anti-black language education that conditions them to despise themselves and regard their linguistic resources as insignificant.

So my work with black youth helped me to see that black students again— that we need a type of framework that explicitly names and richly captures the type of linguistic oppression that is uniquely experienced [and] endured by black language speakers. This is what I'm calling anti-black linguistic racism. What I'm referring to as anti-black linguistic racism describes a linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization that black speakers experience in schools and in everyday life. The anti-black linguistic racism that black youth as well as countless other black people experience and endure in communities and classrooms is not separate from the contemporary forms of anti-black racism and oppression that they encounter while navigating the world in their black bodies.

Anti-black linguistic racism as a framework is important especially because linguistic racism as experienced by black people tend to get overlooked or is undertheorized in broader critical race scholarship and pedagogies. Indeed, folks will argue until they are blue in the face about anti-black racism but once language is brought into the equation those same people will say well you have to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, but in the words of Audre Lorde the master tools will not dismantle the master's house. My theory helps explain precisely how anti-black linguistic racism gets normalized in and through our research, disciplinary discourses, curricular choices, and pedagogical practices, teachers' attitudes, and it shows how damaging these decisions are on black students' language education and racial and linguistic identities. The anti-black racism that black students experience [and] internalize when they use black language

in classrooms is a product of their language education. Carmen Kinard argues that black students learn to monitor their linguistic expressions based on how they have been treated and trained to view themselves in language arts classrooms. Two of the most common approaches that are practiced in language arts classrooms are eradicationist language pedagogies and what I'm labeling respectability language pedagogy.

So under eradicationist pedagogy, black languages are typically not acknowledged at all—that's not acknowledged a language—and it gets treated as linguistically, morally, and intellectually inferior. The goal of this approach is to eradicate black language from black students' linguistic repertoires and replace it with white mainstream English. Anti-black linguistic racism is embedded in this approach as black language gets interpreted as a defect of the student rather than a defect of the educational system's response to them.

Respectability language pedagogies acknowledge black language—it's not like eradicationist—[it] acknowledges black language as a language that should be validated, affirmed, and respected; however, the end goal of this approach is to simply use black language as a bridge to learn white mainstream English. This approach perpetuates anti-blackness as it adheres to the politics of respectability, surrenders to whiteness, and does not challenge anti-black linguistic racism. Speaking of respectability language pedagogies, while I'm here, I may as well talk about code-switching. So this approach essentially posits that teachers should treat black students linguistic practices as equally as possible but should encourage them to code-switch to white mainstream English to avoid discrimination. The problem with this approach, as applied in most classrooms, is that it encourages students to code-switch without any regard to their racial realities or the role of anti-black linguistic racism and how it plays a role and why they are being asked to code their language in the first place. If our language arts instruction consisted of providing black students with critical linguistics tools to decode the notion of code-switching, they will find that this approach is asking them to do more than switch their language; rather, they are being asked to switch their language, their cultural ways of being and knowing, their consciousness, their survival, their community, and their blackness is in favor of a white middle class identity. Still some believe that black students must code-switch to be successful in school in life, and while I'm not denying that some black language speakers have not experienced temporary success by way of code switching, I am questioning what gets lost or sacrificed in the process. What is really achieved? Who is privileged with making these decisions about who has to code-switch to be successful and who does not?

I have heard teachers use exceptionalism discourse with black students by telling them if you code-switch, you can be the next successful or rich black person. You could be Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Oprah. And first of all, we have to stop telling black kids they can be the next such-and-such and let them be the first version of themselves. Second, do we ever tell white students to code-switch so they can be the next Steve Jobs, Ellen DeGeneres, or Donald Trump? No, we don't do it. This is just downright racist. Also, we need to stop playing like Oprah, Barack, and Michelle don't speak black language because they do. I have also heard teachers promise black children that code-switching will help them get into college and earn a college degree, and I just have to think about this. So, we're asking students to give up your culture and your language in favor of achieving, at best, a house, a car, and a whole lot of college debt. Why

would black people want to give up parts of their identity and culture for that dull level of success? Everyone should be questioning this. My point is that we can't be out here using these mediocre and problematic measures of success that only legitimizes a white status quo, American dream, white-picket-fence way of living that is tethered to the death of blackness and black language.

It is also important to interrogate code-switching in light of our current racial and political climate. In many classrooms, black students are encouraged to code-switch as a strategy for survival; however, the students I was working with on a project in Detroit contested this belief. They questioned how code-switching could be a form of survival or self-protection when black people are being discriminated against and killed based on this color of their skin. I remember working with black youth around the same time that George Zimmerman was on trial for Trayvon Martin. The students pointed out how Trayvon Martin used white mainstream English when he said what are you following me for, and that did not protect him from being murdered. The students' critical questioning of code-switching as a tool for survival in the face of racial violence cannot be ignored. There are indeed repetitive instances of black people communicating in what we will believe as standard or white mainstream English and still have acts of racial violence committed against them.

I think about how code-switching or white mainstream English did not protect Michael Brown who said I don't have a gun; stop shooting before he was gunned down by a police officer. Think about Eric Garner who repeated their words I cannot breathe 11 times before he died after he was put in a chokehold by a New York police officer. The students thinking about Trayvon Martin also reminds me of Renisha McBride who communicated in what we think of standard English when she said I just need to go home to Theodore Wafer before he shot and killed her when she knocked on his door after getting into a car accident. I think about John Crawford who said it's not real to police officers about an unpackage BB pellet air rifle he picked up and was holding in a Walmart store before police officers shot and killed him. I also think about Atatiana Jefferson, Ayanna Stanley Jones, Tamir Rice and countless other black children and adults who are victims of racial violence before they could even open their mouth. These instances are clear reminders that code-switching into white mainstream English will not save black people; it cannot solve racial and linguistic injustice, and we cannot pretend that it will.

My students' interrogation of the relationship between language, racial violence, and language arts instruction compels us as language and literacy educators to ask some important questions. If using white mainstream English cannot protect black people from losing their lives, why are we telling black children that code-switching is a strategy for survival? Black students understand that while they could switch their language, they cannot switch their skin. I mean we really have to ask ourselves if we really want to recognize that black people's language practices are legit. The very act of black language being created sheds light on our history. The real truth of the matter is that black people are multilingual, but we don't want to see it—at least not in language and literacy education—because what would it mean for us to acknowledge that black people as multilingual? What would it mean for us to acknowledge that white mainstream English lacks the full capacity for us to communicate our theories of reality, cultural knowledge, and values? We cannot continue to push respectability language pedagogies that require black students to project a white middle-class identity to avoid anti-blackness, especially when they are growing

up amidst black liberation movements like Black Lives Matter which stands against respectability politics and anti-blackness. To do so is essentially encouraging black students to accept dominant narratives that help maintain traditions of white privilege and black oppression.

So, I've told y'all what I'm fighting against, but the question is what am I fighting for—what am I dreaming about? In pursuit of linguistic racial and educational justice for black students, I'm dreaming about an anti-racist black language pedagogy. In contrast to language pedagogies and research that either attribute anti-black linguistic racism to pursuant deficiencies of black students language practices, culture, behavior, attitudes, families, or communities; or respond to anti-black linguistic racism by upholding white linguistic and cultural norms, I'm forwarding anti-black language pedagogy as a transformative approach to black language education. To be clear, an anti-racist approach to language education for black students cannot acquiesce to whiteness or sidestep anti-blackness. These approaches are not transformative nor are they anti-racist. Within an anti-racist black language educational framework, I understand anti-racism in terms of its relationship to challenging anti-blackness in theory, research, and practice. In particular, I want to underscore salient point that [Michael] Dumas and [Kihana] Ross made in their theory of BlackCrit. Only a critical theorization of blackness confronts the specificity of anti-blackness. As far as language education, this suggests is that anti-racist black language pedagogy must center blackness, confronts white linguistic and cultural hegemony, and contest anti-blackness.

Though I'm advocating for a transformative approach to black language my vision of anti-racist black language education—what I'm calling it—it builds on the work of many radical black intellectuals which illustrates how I'm reclaiming and reconnecting with the ideas and recommendations that have already been put forth within a black language research tradition. Black intellectuals make it clear that linguistic and racial justice for black students are not rooted in anti-black language pedagogy that cater to whiteness but in terms of the complete and total overthrow of racist colonial practices so the anti-racist language pedagogy might begin to be imagined and developed to implement. It is in this line of thinking that I imagine an anti-racist black language education and the inner workings of this pedagogy plays out in my book. So I actually— the book shows what this looks like on the ground and it's student-led, and it's informed by the students that I had the privilege of working with in Detroit.

So, I want to close by saying we've been knowin what to do to move toward an anti-racist language of literacy education. The real question is what are y'all waiting on to do to work?

Thank you.

## APPENDIX B

### Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color

Jamila Lyiscott

what's good? how y'all doing? what's good? what's good? all right.. all right... What if I told you that the way that you use language every day had the power to either uphold or disrupt social injustices? What if I told you that because language is saturated with history and culture and memory the way that it is policed within our classrooms and our communities is deeply connected to racism and colonialism?

You see, when I was 19 years old I sat on a panel for a room full of high school students, and a woman in the room stopped me in the middle of speaking, and she said I'm sorry to stop you but I just want you to know that you are so articulate. And in that moment, she meant it as a compliment. A friend of mine next to me was like “boo” and I was offended. And most people can understand that. Most people say well you are offended because you're a young black woman in the space and this woman found it exceptional that you were mastering standard English. But there's another reason why I was offended. I imagined if this woman heard me speaking with my family whose Trinidadian and Caribbean creolized English, would she have determined something else about my intellectual capacity? or if she heard me speaking with my friends in Crown Heights Brooklyn in African American English, would she have determined something different about my worth? And in that moment, I understood that the answer was yes. And that deeply disturbed me. It actually became the impetus for my first TED talk “Three Ways to Speak English.” It actually became the impetus for my research as a social scientist analyzing the intersections of language, race, and power.

You see– I'll share this story and you gotta work with me because it's about a man and a lion and they're talking, alright? Work with me. So the man and the lion are walking through the jungle; together and.. and.. and.. they're arguing about who's the strongest and the lion says ‘I'm the king of the jungle I'm stronger than you’ and the man says ‘I'm the king of the world; I'm stronger than you.’ And they're having this fruitless argument until they stumble upon a picture (still in the jungle keep working with me right) and the picture is of a man defeating a lion, and the man says, ‘you see, I told you I'm stronger than you’ and the lion says ‘yes but who drew that picture?’

What has become important to my work in working with historically marginalized communities at the intersections of language, race, and power and education is interrogating who authors the dominant narratives and the dominant framings in our societies, in our schools, in our.. in our classrooms, [and] in our world. **[noticeable silence]** It's important to know that in exploring and doing this research on language, race, and power, I stumbled upon some really interesting contradictions. You see, what I know of myself is that the multiple literacies that I bring to the

table—my composite linguistic identity—gives me power, but when I enter into institutional spaces—into classroom spaces—that power is not valued and often stripped away. In these spaces that claim to celebrate diversity, that claim to want to celebrate diverse culture, what instead happens is a perpetual invitation to engage in cultural erasure. But I found some contradictions in exploring these questions both contextually and historically, right?

So in the social context of now, one of the contradictions I found was with the McDonald's slogan— who knows that McDonald slogan? “I'm lovin it” right? “I'm lovin it.” We know that. What I found in my research is that this slogan is participating in a feature of African American English called consonant variation—the dropping of the letter G. This very statement “I'm lovin it,” this very feature, this consonant variation is something that would be corrected within the classroom space, if I were to write it on my paper, yet this billion-dollar corporation is able to utilize this linguistic practice for mass appeal and to capitalize on this cultural form of expression.

I found another example in the show *Modern Family*— you know, I love that show— and there's this episode called “She Crazy,” which is weird because like there's not a lot of people of color in the show, right? and so I'm looking at the episode and throughout the episode everyone she crazy, she crazy, she crazy, and I'm like okay. I do my research [and] brilliant scholars have shown us that another feature of African American English exists there called copula absence—the absence of the verb “to be.”

These features that have been asserted and designated and researched by linguists for years have been established as features of African American English that directly connect to the West African languages that they are historically rooted in. These language practices are valued in particular spaces, but there's a contradiction with what happens in institutional spaces, right? And there's a history here. I trouble up this issue because it is resonant with the history that is deeply rooted in racism and colonialism.

There's an East African author; his name is umm— **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**. I speak of him often. He wrote this book called *Decolonizing the Mind*. He speaks about his time existing in colonial Kenya. He was there before Kenya was colonized. He said there was a time when the language of the classroom and the language of the community were one but then came a colonial education. He said Berlin of 1884 was affected through the sword and the bullet, right? But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. He said the bullet was the means of physical subjugation; language was the means of spiritual subjugation. What would happen is if you were caught speaking your mother tongue, Kikuyu, in the classroom in colonial Kenya, you would either be physically beaten or you would have to wear a sign around your neck that said ‘I am stupid’ or ‘I am a donkey.’ It was very important to

the colonial subjugation process that the language of the people who were being oppressed was divorced from the community. Those are some of the practices that we reiterate today.

When I talk about liberation literacies, the work that I do with educators across our country, it's because that historical and contextual dissonance that I'm bringing up plays out right now in our world. I work with members of historically marginalized communities, young black people who say yes I engage in black literacy practices but in places where I feel safe. A sense of fugitivity exists there that has historical resonance in American chattel slavery—a time when it was illegal for black people in this country to be able to read and write. A lot of that resonates with what's happening today in our classroom and in our world. There are so many ways to engage in racism. There are so many ways to engage in oppression. There are wonderful scholars who say language is a site of cultural struggle, right? And if we think about that— if we think about what it means in our institutional spaces to continue participating in the erasure and the oppression of people from historically marginalized groups instead of incorporating, validating, and celebrating who they are in these institutional spaces, then we do a disservice to ourselves and to our world.

So a lot of times, when I bring up this conversation, that question of standard English is the language of power comes about, which is why I brought up the McDonald's example, which is why I brought up the spaces where this power exists. There's a wonderful book called *Articulate While Black* that speaks about President Obama's ability to navigate multiple languages and literacies and his cen— that centrality— the centrality of that was essential to the success of his campaign. You see, a lot of times we hear the word “minority” to refer to people who look like me, but I'm a member of the global majority, and it means that the languages, the literacies, and the power that comes from the marginalized spaces that people of color navigate have wonderful tools and power to transform our world—to give us access.

So when I talk about liberation literacies, really what I'm talking about is a set of principles that emerge out of the work that I do, the research that I've done, and the practice that I engage in. And actually a lot of what you saw today is framed by these principles that I'm going to share with you in a moment. The idea that the voices of these young people cannot be constrained and limited to that typical five paragraph essay. The power of what they have to say is so much deeper than that, and to silence them and to continue marginalizing the identities of students in the service of a singular standard is violence.

So there are five principles— and I call these paradigm principles. I call them paradigm principles because often when I share these principles umm educators, administrators, people who are working in educational contexts— it just sounds like more work to do... like you're giving us more work to do.. we got enough to do, right? Actually, right now, many of the predominantly white institutions that exist inBut these are paradigm principles and I say they're paradigm principles because they are principles that are centered on and governed by a paradigm shift.



Stephen Covey says that paradigms are Maps. Low-key, I want Stephen Covey to be my white uncle.. like really.. like I love this guy, right? So he said like paradigms are maps; it's the way that we approximate reality. And so what I'm saying is that once we reconstruct and understand that institutional spaces must reimagine themselves to truly understand, integrate, and accept the diversity that exists in our world we need new paradigms in order to enact that. Our world still have the infrastructure from slavery. There're historical colleges right now that still have the slave quarters built in. If we don't reimagine our institutional spaces beyond just the inclusion of having someone of a different race in the space, then we are not truly integrating anything, right?

So so the first pa– there are five principles and the five principles they're five As. They're all As because imma poet and I like rhythm I like, you know, I like alliteration; it's just who I am, right? So, there's five As, and the first “A” speaks to *awareness*. The first “A” says ‘who am I?’ If we are thinking about nurturing youth voice creating space for youth voice in our classrooms in new and in powerful ways that disrupt the historical-racist-colonial perceptions that we've upheld for too long, it has to begin with critical awareness. Who am I as a student, Who am I as an educator in this space and what does that mean in our world? And it's not just a random awareness but an awareness of the social identities that we each navigate including the language practices that we bring to the table so that I get to say well actually I speak African American English; I speak Caribbean creolized English there are multiple ways that I understand and articulate and name the world around me, right? The first “A” is that awareness–thinking about who you are and what your linguistic repertoire consists of.

The second “A” speaks to *agency* and *access*. You see, once you understand who you are– once you understand the privileges that are associated with different aspects of who you are or the way that who you are is marginalized in different ways– once you get a full understanding of what that means in our communities, a lot of young people– I work with a lot of young people who engage in African American English practices but have no idea that it has value, because they've been taught that it's wrong, that it's bad, that it's delinquent, that it's deficient– once you go through that awareness process and you become aware that my language has power, right? once you become aware of that then you say well what kind of agency and access exists for me in the world. Because of the way that I speak, because of the tools that I bring to the table with my linguistic repertoire, there are spaces that I can access in the world. It's agency that I can have. That was the argument for Barack Obama's ability to access and bond with different communities because he could speak in different ways.

The third “A” speaks to *actualization*. This principle– this paradigm principle says if we do not create continuous opportunities to actualize different ways of knowing and being and expressing in institutional spaces and then we're not doing this work. And that goes directly to the term liberation, right? So the term liberation– when I say liberation literacies, the term liberation in this framework is actually rooted in liberation theology. Liberation theology argues for the

interpretation of scripture from the perspective of the oppressed—understanding that the central figure of Scripture was actually someone who was poor and marginalized. And it reimagines the way that we can interpret the world if we understand the power that happens in the margins. And so that liberation piece speaks to the disruption that happens in actualization. Having a TED talk at the center of your English curriculum is disruptive. This disrupts the traditional notions of what it means to read and write in our world, right? what it means to inscribe yourself into the narrative of history beyond the five paragraph essay is that I'm gonna go up and I'm gonna speak from the power of my voice. That's actualization; that's disruptive, and that's powerful.

The fourth “A” speaks to *achievement* because a lot of times when, when I do this work There are folks who are like ‘well you know you just want- you want the kids to be lazy.’ Actually, it takes a lot more work to be fully invested in who you are [and] what you have to say than to perform school for somebody who is imposing a structure on you. Achievement means that we have rigorous powerful standards not just for our students but for our classrooms and our institutions. How are our institutions and our classrooms achieving the aims of true diversity and equity? When we think about achievement, we often think about assessing the students, and we never think about assessing the institutions that are meant to serve the students. So achievement is not unidirectional; it says we want to understand how engaging in this process transforms the student but how engaging in this process transforms the space and transforms the discipline. I work with young people in New York City, and we teach them the qualitative research process. They do research— powerful research on their schools and community, but they learn it alongside hip-hop literacies. So when they're sharing with you their research data and analysis process, sometimes they spittin bars. It changes the way that we imagine engaging in the exchanging of content; it actually transforms it. When we engage in in in the in hip-hop cultural practices around freestyle, extemporaneous practices, different cognitive abilities come to the fore. There's value in those practices that challenge the discipline, so achievement speaks to that. Achievement speaks to challenging the standards that we hold for ourselves and our institutions and our world.

And then, the last “A” speaks to *alteration* and *action*. It means that— this is a principle that says that we are invested in understanding— that our institutions must be adaptable, must be accommodating, and truly inclusive of diverse ways of knowing. So once we understand the way that a different form of literacy then the linguistic repertoire, the history, the cultures, the memories of the young people that we work with, once we understand the way that that challenges this institution we think about how we reimagine the institutional space. My curriculum can't stay the same. My pedagogical approaches cannot stay the same. This institution might need to reimagine itself. Back to the hip-hop example, in hip-hop, the cypher that we participate in is a circle. There is no one person standing at the front bearing all knowledge and imposing it on the room. It's a democratic space, so when I teach in my classrooms as a professor, we gotta sit in a circle. We gotta challenge the idea of what teaching and learning

looks like because I'm learning from this cultural space that there are different ways of imagining our world.

I say to you this story of my father who taught me how to ride a bike when I was 10 years old in Brooklyn. And I had a little pink bike, and he uh, you know– he [was] just like..right.. jump on it, go for it. I got on the bike, and I fell, right? Cuz I didn't know how to ride a bike. Soo... over and over again, he tried to get me– he tried to hold me; it didn't work out. So he said– he said ‘get off the bike.’ He has a thick Trini accent, so he didn't say like *get the bike* right right– he has like a whole accent. So he's like ‘get off the bike.’ I got off the bike and he's like ‘do you have balance’ and I’m like I don’t know, like I’m ten, I don’t know. He's like ‘do you have balance?’ He said ‘so I want you to stand on one foot.’ I stood on one foot. He said– a couple of minutes.. I'm like yo this guy's trippin.. like I don't know what's going on wit daddy today. But okay, I'm just on this sidewalk standing on one foot. After a couple of minutes, I found my balance. He said ‘now get back on the bike.’ I got back on the bike, and I rode straight down the block.

What my father taught me in that moment was that if I did not have balance in myself, it would be impossible for me to have balance on the bike. I introduce this framework, this notion of liberation literacies, and call-to-action for a paradigm shift that begins with a critical awareness of yourself and your world because if we do not have socially just practices in ourselves, here in the silence then it is impossible to have social justice in our world.

Thank you.

[Applause]

## APPENDIX C

### **Black Languages Matter Anne Charity Hudley**

Hi everyone, my name is Anne Charity Hudley. I'm the North Hall Chair in the Linguistics of African America at the University of California, Santa Barbara. My job and my joy in life is to share, describe, and discover the ways in which Black people throughout the world communicate with the focus on education and culture and language and joy. And so I'm gonna share with you about my work today. And my title is "Black Languages Matter: Learning the Languages and Language Varieties of the Black Diaspora."

We are all currently in a moment of pandemic and protest and people from all throughout the world have been reaching out to me to ask, "What can I do to help make change and make true the idea that Black Lives Matter?" And I've been encouraging people who love language, who love linguistics to really use that interest, that talent, and that joy to help learn more about Black language, Black culture and the languages and the language varieties of the Black diaspora, and that's what I'm gonna do a little bit with you all today.

I wanna start by sharing and celebrating some of the texts that really have influenced me and my work and really have influenced what I'm gonna share with you today. Those works include: "Spoken Soul" by John Rickford, "African American English: A Linguistic Introduction" by Lisa Green, "Talkin and Testifyin" by Geneva Smitherman, "Language in the Inner City" by William Labov, and "Black Linguistics" by Sifre Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha Ball and Arthur Spears.

For me there are three important aspects concerning what we need to know about Black language and Black culture that really frames how I think about this. The first is that we need to know that Black languages and language varieties exist. Sharing information about the varieties and sharing information about the ways in which Black people communicate, what languages they speak, how they speak them, how they write them is an important first aspect of what we'll do today. The second is knowing what Black languages and what Black language varieties look like and sound like. And then the third is knowing how Black languages impact the Black experience. The most important concept when we're learning about Black languages and Black language varieties is that language is culture and your language is your Black. And so in this way, both your Black and your languages are beautiful.

I think about culture not just as artifacts or tools or tangible elements, but how people in a particular group, for me the Black diaspora, have values, symbols and interpretations and perspectives that distinguish people in the Black diaspora and really share their identity and culture. That's important because it's really important to know that we have multiple varieties and languages within Black languages. The cultures vary from person-to-person, from place-to-place and this really became true to me in my study of pidgins and creoles. We know that pidgins and creoles have a history in the change and varieties of languages as they come into contact with each other, as people, particularly from Europe, colonized places and brought enslaved people to them. But what that really did was create a diaspora that we can trace through the languages,

through the language use, the vocabulary, the grammar, the cultural ideas that are shared. And that work really was first demonstrated by a scholar named Lorenzo Dow Turner.

Lorenzo Dow Turner was an anthropologist and a linguist at Howard University, a historically Black college in Washington, D.C. Lorenzo Dow Turner traced vocabulary and cultural practices for people in the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia who speak a creole called Gullah to the languages and language varieties of West Africa. A particular movie that shows the incredible work of Lorenzo Dow Turner is "The Language You Cry In." In the movie it shows Turner's work tracing what had become a song that was sung by families particularly by children and mothers in the sea islands of Georgia, back to West Africa, where they discovered that it was originally a Mende funeral or burial song. The documentary shows that African American language and cultural practice was transmitted through communities and changed, but that connection back to Africa was direct and real. And so for me I wanna encourage all of you to consider studying different languages from the African continent.

The first African language that I had an opportunity to study was Ge'ez, that is the classical language of the Christian Ethiopian church. For me what that allowed me to see was the relationship between languages in East Africa and languages of the Arab diaspora, particularly Hebrew and Arabic, and really helped me understand the relationship between the cultures and languages of all of Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. There are so many languages and varieties in Africa; I won't try to put a number on it, but there are some large language families—the Niger-Congo language family, the Nilo-Saharan language family, the Khoisan language family, and then the Afroasiatic of which Ge'ez is a member. And what is so important thinking about this, is that there are also languages that don't seem to be related to each other. So we need more research and more understanding of how those languages came about, how they're varying and changing today, and what those relationships may be, but we just don't have the information.

Pidgins and creole languages are found throughout the world. Those that I think about associated with Black people are primarily in Africa, in the Caribbean, in Latin and North America, but we can see the process of creolization throughout how Black people communicate as we combine different languages and different varieties of language with others. Traditionally, creoles have been described by the European or the colonizing language, but many scholars work to show that it is the contact between languages, between the African languages and the European, that makes the creoles real. So I like to present this in a world map rather than just thinking about it categorically of which languages had contact with English speakers, with French speakers, Spanish, Portuguese or other languages. That's because the African influence is just as important, if not more important for those Black speakers as we look at language not just as the grammar or the sounds, but the communication, the discourse, the cultural communicative practices.

The study of Black language and culture helps us see that the diaspora is real. So I have found an amazing video by damsel21 on TikTok where you'll see a Jamaican speaker and a Nigerian speaker comparing the ways that they pronounce different words. You'll hear some of the ways that the Black diaspora language manifests in these speakers, but what is so fun for me is not just the difference but the similarity, how they communicate with each other and really understand that full sense of Black language variety and culture.

-Forest. -Forest.  
-Bottle. -Bottle.  
-Pomegranate. -Pomegranate.  
-Macaroni. -Macaroni.  
-Vitamins. -Vitamins.  
-Paddle. -Paddle. -Uh-uh.  
-Military. -Military.  
-Oil. -Oil.  
-Then how do you say aisle? -Aisle  
-Plantain. -Plantain.  
[both giggling]  
-Coconut. -Coconut.  
-Neighbor. -Neighbor.  
[both giggling]  
-Tomato. -Tomato.  
[both giggling]

The focus of my work is on African American language and culture in the United States. It is also a diaspora. When Black people originally came to the United States, they mostly came as enslaved people to the Southeast United States. But particularly after the First and Second World War, large numbers of African Americans moved from the Southeast United States across the country, taking their language, their culture and their customs with them. So I've been particularly interested in how those different people from different African traditions and backgrounds have come together in the United States, have come in contact with people from all around the world, and how that's influenced, not just Black language and culture, but the whole language and culture of the United States and then the world.

I consider myself to be part of the Black migration tradition as I grew up in Southeastern United States in Tidewater, Virginia, but now I live in California in what would be considered coastal or Southern California, and I know how my language has changed even as I've lived here, but also how I talk differently to Black people in Virginia and how I talk differently to Black people in California. We've learned that all languages have value. An important concept for the Black diaspora is that your language is not broken and neither are you. This is really important because in the history of segregation, discrimination, colonization, the languages that Black people speak have been described as broken or incomplete and so a lot of this work really helps support the idea that there is no broken English, not for Black people, but really not for anyone. We've learned a lot about how African American English varies within the Black or African American English diaspora. So I'm gonna give you some examples of how that works. And one that has had a lot of focus relates to consonants and how they are either produced or not produced depending on the variety, but also depending on the speaker, and this is known as inherent variation.

So how consonants are produced is influenced by if a person is African American, but also where the consonant is produced in the word. So "stir", S-T-I-R, "resting", R-E-S-T-I-N-G and "rest" may vary because "stir", at the beginning of the word, the consonant there is S-T,

is usually pronounced "stir". So "stir", the consonants are at the beginning of the word, S-T or "stir" is usually pronounced. But "resting", where the consonants are in the middle of the word, "resting" may sound like "res-ting" or "resing". And then "rest", where the S-T is at the end of the word, may sound like "rest", or it may be produced as "res" or "re". And it really varies again, not just by who's speaking, but it could vary in a particular moment. And how does that happen? We know that variation is internal to a language, but also external, the age of a speaker, their gender, sexual orientation, the geographic distribution, where you are in the world and who you're speaking to varies. And it can vary by if you're speaking to other Black speakers who also use Black varieties of language, if you're speaking to people of different social cultural groups, if you're at home, if you're having fun, or if you're at work, all of that can help influence how you would pronounce the word in a given situation.

Something important to know about African American languages and varieties and Black diasporic languages and varieties is that it's important to understand how much of the variety two different communicators actually understand. This concept is known as mutual intelligibility and for me it is at the heart of my work. Two people could be speaking English and they would absolutely be correct in saying they speak English, or variety of English, but what's important is to understand how much communication is really happening between the two speakers. I studied this a lot in educational settings, historically in the United States, African Americans have fought hard for their right to education through the history of segregation and discrimination and that history has also made it such that the majority of teachers in the United States are white. So it's really important, this concept of mutual intelligibility, to study how much communication is effective between Black students and white teachers in particular.

Another concept that's really important is that speakers of different but related varieties of a language could understand each other without much prior support. This is the way that the linguistic Black diaspora became real for me. When I was a first year student at Harvard University, my instructor, who's now a professor at the University of Michigan, Marlyse Baptista, was teaching pidgins and creole languages and she started to put some different forms on the board. I was a first year student just getting started in linguistics and as she was speaking and writing, I realized I already understood what she was talking about. And so what it made clear for me is that understanding how these varieties occur is not necessarily just something you would learn in a linguistics or language class, but through your lived linguistic experience. And that gives us the concept that we can really understand each other to varying degrees. A question that I often get, especially when we know that learning English is important in the world is, "Why then do languages still vary?" "Why are there still creoles?" "Why do people still communicate using African-American English if learning English is so important?" And my argument is that people use their language variety because they want to preserve their meaning. So while we could speak another language or another variety and express ourselves in--in different varieties of English, including standardized English, we preserve meaning and cultural value through our use of African-American language.

This concept is key, and it's really been expressed in linguistic research, but also in a resolution that was passed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication which is a part of the National Council of Teachers of English. The resolution states that students have a right to their own language. And this is important, they say for communicative purposes, so that people

preserve their meaning, but also that they preserve their humanity, their sense of community and their dignity as learners. And so what we are working on now is really making sure that that student's right to their own language rings true throughout the Black diaspora. This struggle for linguistic and human rights has been led by people who have been making linguistic and human rights true for people throughout the world. The work of leaders, including Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, show to us that the language of Black activism is powerful beyond measure. The human rights, the civil rights justice, that's been linguistically and rhetorically expressed by Black people has not just brought about rights for Black people, but rights for everyone. And so understanding how Black communication happens gives us an idea on how we can have the linguistic and cultural power to change everything, the entire world. So studying the strategies, studying the practices, studying the ways in which a Black speaker draws an audience in, gives an audience hope, makes change happen is an important aspect of the study of Black language and culture. The study of Black language and culture has also shown that your Black doesn't have to look or sound like mine. The varieties are rich and real, and they are just now really beginning to be described fully. So I wanna encourage people to listen, learn and share so that the research can really reflect the fact that there is so much inherent, external, social, cultural, and identity variation within the Black diaspora.

Documenting and sharing this variation is important beyond interest because it has educational implications. Traditionally, language use, which language you speak and how you speak it has been incorrectly tied to both intelligence and achievement in school settings. So many scholars, one I wanna highlight now is my colleague Michel DeGraff. Michel is a professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology also known as MIT. Michel is from Haiti, and speaks Haitian Creole and is working to really ensure that more students in Haiti get a chance to learn in Haitian Creole rather than in the colonizer language, French. Michel has shown that this is so important as students learn in any context, but particularly in STEM, or Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics concepts as students are doing complicated mathematical, technological work having to translate into French which is the language that they may not really have even had a chance to learn and piece the entire learning process. So this idea of linguistic discrimination, linguistic equality, has direct implications on learners. This information is important in all realms of life. In education, where knowing about Black languages and Black varieties can help students learn not just STEM, but how to read and how to communicate and be part of the educational community. This information has implications for law, and in the legal system, as Black people interact with police officers, with judges and juries and lawyers and attorneys, and making sure that their stories, their communication is understood is an important aspect of work that's going on with respect to African Americans in particular, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Information about language varieties is important for people in the speech and hearing realm as well. Particularly linguistic details of how people pronounce their words, what grammatical patterns they use and how their community practices were prior to strokes, if they have differences and are working on sounding more like their community is important so that speech and hearing professionals don't make people sound like Standardized English varieties or standard other languages that are not their target home community variety. Knowing about Black languages and varieties is important in business when people apply for jobs, as they work in workplaces and make sure that they have opportunities for the future, being judged on the way that you speak or different ways that you write that are tied to your language and culture can result in economic situations that are undesirable. People may



not-- Black people may not be hired. They may not be given promotions because of the way that they kind of appear or sound to others.

And so it's really important for us to advocate for the study of Black language, Black culture, Black varieties, African languages, Caribbean languages so that human rights, human justice, civil rights could be more directly tied to linguistic justice. And in this way for me, we will really know that linguistically, culturally, and all the way around, Black Lives Matter. So I'm gonna stop today and encourage you to start to learn more about Black languages, Black language varieties. Maybe you've heard something on television or on social media, or you've heard a song, or maybe you have a communication situation with a Black person and you didn't quite understand something or you wanna learn more. Now's the time to do that, so that you too could be part of this movement for linguistic and social justice.

I wanna thank a few people now who've been responsible for this work and who have supported the work and who have sponsored this work. I wanna thank the National Science Foundation, the University of California, particularly the Historically Black Colleges and University initiative that has allowed me to do this work not only at UC Santa Barbara, but at colleges and universities in the United States that have supported Black students and educators and researchers for hundreds of years. I also wanna thank all of my colleagues, my students, and participants in the work overtime who have really made it real. And I wanna thank all of you for joining me today, and now we'll have some time for questions.