CASE STUDIES OF THE ACQUISITION OF STANDARD
AMERICAN ENGLISH BY SPEAKERS OF BLACK
ENGLISH VERNACULAR

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University

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College of Education
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1993
DEDICATION

To my wife, Ruth LaVerne Decker Price, whose kindness, love, consideration, support, and sacrifice were so important to the completion of this most arduous task.

To my wonderful children, Scott and Laurie, who always provide the confidence and inspiration to keep trying.

To the students who participated so willingly in this study and whose lives and diligence provide the best examples for any person to emulate.
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Major Field of Study

Education
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement Of Problem and Research Question

Increasingly, anyone functioning in the different levels of society must master various discourse modes appropriate to particular situations. For many African Americans, whose existence is rooted in the Black culture, Black English Vernacular may be adequate for most of their needs. But for the Black college students who are pursuing a life in the powerful mainstream, society expects them to make the transition from the vernacular to the standard language required in oral and written communication. In order to succeed, such students find it necessary to develop bidialectal fluency, to learn to recognize the appropriate dialect for each situation, and to be able to shift styles adroitly. This shift is more than the common choices most are faced with in a monolingual culture (such shifts as those involved with slang, vulgarisms, or jargon.) Labov (1970) says that sociolinguistic principles indicated that there are no single-style speakers. This register change for Black
English Vernacular involves moving away from one's native tongue (the language one is born into). To the Black students attending a predominantly-Black populated college, the challenge to switch codes may be even greater since the classroom and the rest of the campus offer conflicting language forces. Add to this what William Labov (1970) offered in his study of non-standard speakers: in acquiring native tongue, one's dialect will be most influenced by his peers. Furthermore, development of sed language occurs between the ages of 4 and 15. Moving into a new language area at 10 or 11 is usually too late to equal the proficiency of a native speaker (Labov, 1970; Wardhaugh, 1993). So secondary school and college may be too late to hope for thorough acquisition of Standard American English. If that is the case, the obstacles to mastering Standard English at the college level are even greater.

While it is natural to be curious about this new dialect experience, encountered by the researcher, corollary questions occurred about background differences. Among the students studied, particularly noticeable were those members of the student body who used Standard English in both writing and speech. Why was the Standard American English of some students so different from the register used by most of the Black students in my
classes? Had their learning experiences been so unique or powerful? What had given them an important advantage which most of the Black students lacked? Were these Standard American English students gifted? If they were gifted, were they socially ostracized by their peers? Yet these students were not isolated or alienated from their peers. In fact, they functioned very well among their peers and were adept at using Black English in informal student settings.

Out of such concerns arose the research questions: What factors enable some Black college students to negotiate the style shift between Black Discourse and Standard American English? How may environment, education, and other people influence the development of Black English Vernacular and Standard American English?

The research problem emerged from my new experience of teaching Freshman English at an historically Black university where more than 95% of the students are Black. As Merriam (1988) has said, the qualitative case study research emanates from a question that arises from the teacher’s classroom experiences; in my case, my practice of teaching African Americans. One of the purposes of this study is to allow the reader to be "there" in the lives and experiences of the case studies in order to gain
important insights and understanding of two language forces and their effective uses. Further discussion of use of case studies will occur in Chapter 3.

The answers to these questions are vital if we are serious about understanding what influences an African-American college student's development of language skills. It is informative for the college instructor to discover what in the backgrounds of such students affects their language facility or causes problems. This information provides insights and possible strategies to remedy problems in communication. Even more important may be the implications for young Black students, parents, and educators in elementary and secondary schools to enable the student to arrive at college prepared to deal with its language requirements of SAE. The most frequent complaint of our faculty is the weak preparation in formal composition skills that students bring to college. A primary audience for this study is those people actively involved with developing the necessary background of these young people--parents, elementary and secondary teachers, and the students themselves.

Common experiences in the case studies' backgrounds may suggest steps to contribute to the development of the SAE register in the speaking and writing of African-
American children. Kenny and Grotelueschen (1980) call the case study the "common language approach to evaluation" (p. 5). Merriam (1988) states 'Using common language, as opposed to scientific or educational jargon, allows the results of a study to be communicated more easily to nonresearchers' (p. 31). Too often, educational research uses jargon and "erudite" constructions intended for an informed audience--an elite group--excluding the larger reading public. This writer seeks a format that researchers as well as most readers can comprehend.

Observations early in my experience teaching African-American students revealed that they are much more comfortable talking than writing. Most of the students prefer giving a speech to writing a response. Consequently, individual interviews reveal much more information about a culture whose language development was impeded because of hundreds of years when reading and writing were illegal for slaves. Those African Americans with both the skill and enjoyment of writing stood out from the large majority.

Significance of this Study

This study may provide valuable insights to deal with a problem of divergent discourse which many thought was improving, but, instead, may be getting worse.
Black English remains "a deprived mode of communication that looks in at the ghetto rather than out at the big world" (Burgess, 1992, p. 311). Burgess talks of a prejudice toward the ghetto speech employed by African Americans. He cites New York film critic John Simon, a guardian of "pure and undefiled" English, who says "with some justice" that African Americans should speak "'standard English' in order to get ahead." He further cited William Prashker in The New York Times who spoke of "the need for blacks to forget their ghetto culture when trying to 'impress the man downtown'" [the white boss] (1992, p. 308). While Anthony Burgess has a wider reading audience than most linguists or scholars, a larger reading public would consider the observations of a newspaper journalist like Tom Teepen as a realistic view of American culture.

In June of 1991, Tom Teepen, editorial page editor of The Atlanta Constitution, wrote an article which appeared in national syndication, entitled "Talking the talk in black and white: Language gap between the races widening." What he says has implications not only for education, but also social ramifications that are both shocking and frightening. Teepen speaks of the divergent English spoken particularly by African Americans as "terrifying."

First it was assumed that the by-then pervasive influence of national radio and television, with
their accentless English and careful avoidance of idiomatic expression, would drag all Americans toward an averaged English. And that does appear to be happening, to a degree. The Southern practice of dropping R's--"fo" instead of "for"--is fading, for example (1991).

While Teepen acknowledges such change in the language of African Americans, he also claims that many Blacks are making the transition very slowly, if at all. "leaving large numbers speaking an English that distances them from white contemporaries, where once it bound them in common regionalism" (1991). He also tells of the assumption that eliminating formal Jim Crow segregation and rearing a generation under new civil rights laws would bring Blacks and whites together in all regards.

In 1968, the federal Kerner Commission, which had been impaneled to study the ghetto rioting in recent summers, found that America "is moving toward two societies: one black, one white--separate and unequal." The commission recommended a regimen of strategies to avoid that. We implemented few, were half-hearted in the ones we did take up and have failed (Teepen, 1991).

This researcher has observed that a majority of the students at this historically Black university come from urban schools with mostly an African-American population. A few speak of having attended high schools with mostly white students and white teachers. Their primary reason for attending an historically Black college is to learn and to experience more about their culture. These
students also have stronger language skills using Standard American English, probably from their associations with SAE speakers.

A few years ago research in Philadelphia found that a distinct dialect was developing in the city’s black ghetto, one with its own consistent usages and grammar, though it sounds merely illiterate to whites and brands every black child reared in it with a disadvantage. The reasons? Many. Whites keep moving away from blacks, even from middle-class black families who, except for color, are in no way distinguishable from whites; the ease most of us have developed together at the workplace has not led to equally easy socializing (Teepen, 1991).

One medium-sized midwestern city verifies the same pattern with a city school population that is over 65 percent Black because of white flight to the suburbs after mandatory busing. The adjacent suburban schools have very few African-American students. Although a large number of elected city positions and numerous other positions of importance are increasingly held by African Americans, housing and socialization patterns label many cities as divided.

In Jonathan Kozol’s Savage Inequalities (1991) he reveals distressing figures from public schools where nearly fifty percent of students drop out. The buildings are in deplorable condition with little or no equipment or textbooks, and inadequate staffing and overcrowding.
"Out-and-out racism which in our city and our society is institutionalized has allowed this to go on for years," says David Dinkin, mayor of New York City (in Kozol, 1991, p. 116). Kozol goes on to say the compulsory iniquity, perpetuated by state law, too frequently "condemns our children to unequal lives" (1991, p. 56). Kozol observes that social policy regarding housing, health, and welfare for Black children and poor children has been set back several decades, but that in public schooling it has regressed more like one hundred years. "Nationwide, black children are three times as likely as white children to be placed in classes for the mentally retarded but only half as likely to be placed in classes for the gifted. . . ." (Kozol, 1991, p. 119). Kozol shows that almost half of urban high school students drop out before graduation. Less than one fourth of them consider college, and most of these never finish (1991).

Many commentators feel that the years after the Civil Rights Bill have shown little progress for African Americans. Teepen calls them wasted:

We have wasted a decade of potential progress in political backsliding, suckering for a professed colorblindness that slyly holds any deliberate effort to work blacks into the white mainstream to be a violation of evenhandedness. Nor has black leadership always helped. Legitimate black pride has been extruded by some to an Afrocentric extremism that champions the very isolation that is deadening black opportunity (1991).
Shelby Steele (1990) also accuses the Black leadership of distorting the view of the situation. When the Civil Rights Bill was passed in 1964, the leaders failed to realize that African Americans had had very little experience with freedom. And while this bill provided greater freedom, it did not deliver the skills and attitudes that are required to thrive in freedom. Freedom is stressful, difficult, and frightening—a "burden," according to Sartre, because of the responsibility it carries. Oppression conditions people away from all the values and attitudes one needs in freedom—individual initiative, self-interested hard work, individual responsibility, delayed gratification, and so on (Steele, 1990, pp. 68-69).

Developments in a language reveal much about a community—how people are communicating, how they co-exist, what problems are surfacing, which problems have been overcome.

Language is a core sample of society. Its shifts tell us how our community geology is developing; where strata are fusing, where rifts are opening. Many whites like to delude themselves about the end of racism, which is thought to have occurred several years ago and to have left us with no racial work to do. The linguists tell us something very different—a cautionary tale of dangerously deepening racial isolation and estrangement (Teepen, 1991).

It is this "racial isolation and estrangement" observed first hand in the role of English teacher at a college with a population virtually all African-American students that prompted this study. It became even more
apparent to me over the past three years (1990-1993) while working as chairman of a task force for racial unity. After creation and adoption of a statement to correct racism, action groups of community representatives were established to identify specific problems and to implement a plan of action. The group's first two meetings, chaired by the director of minority affairs at a state university, focused on language as a major element in attitudes of racism. Understanding the influence on and approaches to language acquisition is important to both educators and laymen alike, not just a question for the academic community.

*Facing the Facts* (1993) reports what many Black children and Black households confront every day—"barriers in obtaining proper health and prenatal care, securing a quality public school education, finding a well-paying job and raising a family in economically depressed communities" (p. 3).

Today, unfortunately, growing numbers of children walk into school unprepared to learn. These are children who have poor nutrition, too little sleep, and who come from homes where books and educational resources are a luxury. Add to this that poor families move frequently, it is little wonder that these children perform poorly in school.
Nearly three-quarters of [the state’s] black students attend public schools whose student bodies are predominantly poor. Research shows that these students do not do as well academically as those attending school with few low-income students. It is in these low-income school districts where the challenges to effective public education are perhaps the greatest. And it is here where public and private intervention is needed most (Harris, 1993, p. 20).

**Background of Differences of Black Discourse**

"Why you frontin me?"

"Ah ain’t. I jus be chillin."

"Don’t dis me bro!"

"What you mean? You be perpin."

Such expressions were uttered in the casual conversations of African-American students included in this study.

What it is! What is it? It is the voice of Black America, variously labeled Black English, Black dialect, Black Idiom, or recently, Ebonics. Black writer Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, called it the "language of soul." White writer Norman Mailer named it the "language of hip." Some folk, like poet Nikki Giovanni, refer to it as just plain "black talk" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 10).

For more than thirty years, a controversy has been smoldering over Black speech patterns and whether they
should be changed. "I mean, really, it seem like everybody and they momma done had something to say on the subject!" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 1).

Now, concern over the speech of blacks and educational programs to bring about dialect change have been generated by two major forces. The first major force was the social change movements (or upheavals—depending on where you come from) of the sixties, spearheaded by the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation decision, followed by the 1955 refusal of black Rosa Parks to move to the back of the bus, and the emergence of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights thrust followed by black power and the black cultural consciousness movement.

The second major force was embodied in White America's attempt to deal with this newly released black energy by the implementation of poverty programs, educational and linguistic remediation projects, sociolinguistic research programs, and various other up-from-the-ghetto and "Great Society" efforts. As we know, these two forces have not acted in concert. While blacks were shouting "I'm black and I'm proud," Anglos were admonishing them to "be like us" and enter the mainstream. While you had black orators, creative artists, and yes, even scholars rappin in the Black Thang, educators (some of them black, to be sure) were preaching the Gospel that Black English speakers must learn to talk like White Speakers in order to "make it" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 2).

Smitherman accurately describes the coexistence of different language forces in the Black culture. As would be true in an academic setting, the majority Black faculty at our university conduct business in Standard English and expect Black students to master it for use in academics as
well as the professional world after graduation. Three years ago the core curriculum increased freshman English courses from three hours to five hours to allow more instruction time for both written and spoken English skills.

Identification of Black English

Identifying Black English, its origin and workings, its role both within the Black culture and its interaction with the white world must be examined in order to provide the necessary background for this study. Geneva Smitherman defines Black Dialect as: "...an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America. Black language is Euro-American with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone, and gesture" (1977, p. 2). Eighty to ninety percent of American Blacks use Black Discourse at least some of the time, creating a culture of survival in an alienated environment. While enriching the language of all Americans,

...the beauty and power of the idiom lies in its succinctness: saying the same thing in standard written English has taken more than ten times as many words. Black English, then, is a language mixture, adopted to the conditions of slavery and discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with and inextricable from Afro-American culture (Smitherman, 1977, p. 3).
People such as Labov (1970) and Dillard (1972) acknowledge that Black activists sought not only recognition of social and political rights but language rights as well, noting Black English as a legitimate language. Some students encountered in the classroom who were Muslim or followers of Louis Farrakhan are almost militant about using their Black English. However, such pride in their language was confronted within Black communities by middle-class African Americans who saw the necessity of mastering Standard American English to ward off further disadvantage for their children (McCrum, 1986).

This researcher has had many conversations with not only Black colleagues at the university but also African-American citizens from churches and community committees who are dismayed by the language of Black students who do not possess a working knowledge of Standard English. The discourse of the students reported in the case studies, however, was particularly noteworthy in their mastery of Standard American English in both writing and speaking.

Some Black leaders recognize the role of Black English but almost diminish its significance on a broader level. Constance Clayton, who is Philadelphia's African-American superintendent of schools, said:

I consider Black English as a dialect of a
particular ethnic group—the Blacks. I consider it incorrect English. I would want an understanding of it, an appreciation of it, as we would for other dialects. . .but we should never lose sight of the need to provide for our young people access to Standard English, which is really a gateway for them to the broader community (McCrum, 1986, p. 230).

Delpit (1988) suggests that children must be taught whatever codes are necessary to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, by emphasizing the context of meaningful communicative efforts, not inane subskills. Students must have access to the teacher’s knowledge while being respected for their own “expertness” as well. They must also be taught to recognize the culture of power and the arbitrary nature of those codes and the power relationships they stand for. Ultimately, she calls for the participation of Black educators and parents in the decisions, keeping in mind that they have something to contribute to a true dialogue rather than the silenced one in existence.

Language History

What is the relevance in discussing the history of Black English and its legitimacy as a language? It is a positive factor affecting the BEV speaker’s desire to acquire SAE. Rather than viewing BEV as inferior dialect, little more than a collection of wrong choices, the advocates of SAE do not denigrate the African American who
defensively refrains from using SAE. Instead, each language and culture is viewed as having dignity and significance.

McCrum noted that for over 350 years most African Americans have lived in a world of disorientation. From the time they were uprooted from their tribal homes and transformed into nothing more than chattel on the commodities market, Blacks had lost their human worth and taken on a pariah quality. These slaves came from many lands including Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast and spoke any one of hundreds of different languages, such as Wolof, Zulu, or Twi. They were constantly shifted to prevent those of common language background from communicating and possibly leading some kind of insurrection; even families were brutally separated. Any English acquired came from the Liverpool or Bristol sailors who manned the slave ships (certainly nothing resembling instruction in foreign language and grammar). The outgrowth of such circumstances led to a pidginization and subsequent creolization which contributed to Black English Vernacular (McCrum, 1986).

Tracing the exact origins of Black English Vernacular is impossible because of its oral tradition. Hardly any written accounts existed before 1900 (except for scatterings of dialogue written for drama or fiction). The
Pidgin that emerged was the result of British English, largely, and West African languages co-existing in a land that was foreign to all. While the socially-dominant group would prevail, the socially-inferior group, in this case Black English speakers, would still affect "English," particularly in vocabulary. English has been enriched by many African words and phrases, such as: banana, juke, tote, banjo, voodoo, jive, nitty-gritty. Furthermore, social inferiority must not suggest less intellect or lack of structure in expressing ideas. Black English is a legitimate language (McCrum, 1986).

Black English speakers, in fact, have been ridiculed for their grammar when, according to McCrum, as well as Labov, linguists have discovered some language structures which may be superior to those which are a part of Standard American English. Two such examples are their use of the verb be and spoken duh, which in decreolization was replaced by does. "Black English also has useful refinements that Standard English lacks, for instance the use of be to signify a stable condition in a sentence like: some of them be big. In Black English, he be working means that 'he has a steady job'" (McCrum, 1986, p. 199). The more refined the language, the more effective the communication.
Regardless of the contributions Blacks have made to American language and culture in society as a whole, Black English retains its inferior status which means that Blacks must be able to make the style shift to Standard English if they wish to excel in American mainstream existence. At the same time, their environment has conditioned them to speak Black English not only during the formative years but also in adulthood to preserve their Black heritage.

While Wardhaugh (1993) acknowledges the argument that Black English is very close to Standard English with only superficial differences,

the creolist view is that the differences are profound rather than superficial and cannot be accounted for by rules. . . . Creolists insist that only if we are prepared to recognize that only as being quite different will we be able to appreciate the true nature of the communicative problems that sometimes appear to exist between speakers of Black English and English (p. 162).

The argument will not readily be resolved, for the advocates of Black culture will continue to defend the use of the Vernacular and the "purists" will consider SAE the language for success. The differences may continue to be the problem.

Use of Black English Vernacular

One might think in these "post-Civil Rights Act
years" that Blacks would be assimilated almost entirely into mainstream life and discourse, but bigotry and prejudice continue to impose a separation of Blacks. As mentioned before, white flight has increased ghettoization of urban areas into Blacks Only sections where Standard American English is rarely heard or uttered. Ghettoization increases use of Black English Vernacular. Even the flood of broadcast media has not been shown to be a significant language teacher. Use of their own Black English Vernacular becomes a defensive response to a world which has rejected them. At times students who are active in militant groups such as the Black Muslims may deliberately use "be" as a main verb, or specialized vocabulary such as "homeboy" or "perpin," thinking the white listener will be excluded from understanding the conversation. Coupled with this attempted ostracism is a kind of pride in the discourse which has been fostered in the writings of people like Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Leroi Jones, and Gwendolyn Brooks.

Consequently, the United States might be faced with the prospects of bidialectalism surfacing from Black English as well as Spanish. Dillard (1972) has pointed out that the United States could become "bidialectal" in major urban settings in the near future which would involve giving some official recognition to Black English
and eliminate the label "non-standard" to the language of Black people. While Dillard said this over twenty years ago, BEV remains a primary register for large numbers of people isolated in urban ghettos.

Earlier in the twentieth century bidialectalism was a term alluding to the Negroes who moved north from southern states (Svejcer, 1978). Sol Adler recommended bidialectalism and bicultural education programs be started in preschool years before skills in reading and writing are taught to help children process information. "If we are to provide an adequate education for the minority poor, and especially black children, we must consider other alternatives to the current unidialectal and unicultural language arts teaching strategies" (Adler, 1984, p. 15).

In 1979 children brought a law suit in Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board; this has come to be known as the "Black English Case." While the Judge did not mandate a dual language program, he did maintain that the school's response to Black English was a barrier.

The school's negative reaction to and rejection of Black speech patterns constitutes a barrier which takes the form of: mislabeling; negative teacher attitudes, expectations and predictions about the educability of Black children; the misuse of language assessment/speech pathology and other standardized tests; and other similarly obstructive educational policies and practices

Therefore, Judge Joiner affirmed that school districts were legally obligated to acknowledge and establish that Black English is, as well-documented in academic scholarship, "a systematic, rule-governed language system, with linguistic antecedents in Africa and America, forged in the crucible of struggle that is the Black American Experience" (Smitherman, 1981, p. 20). Smitherman goes on to say that such a ruling "underscores the viability and credence of Black English for those tending toward skepticism about the status and simultaneously mandates that, as far as Black kids are concerned, the schools must righteously T.C.B. [take care of business]" (1981, pp. 19-20).

W.E.B. DuBois in *Souls of Black Folk*, back in 1903, wrote:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others... One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . . The strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost (Smitherman, 1981, p. 15).
Today, African Americans face the duality of preserving their culture and compromising it in dialect and lifestyle to survive mainstream existence.

Smitherman applies DuBois' double consciousness in language as a "linguistic push-pull," pushing toward Americanization of Black English and pulling of its Africanization. Both linguistic systems have been necessary for Black survival in White America--Black English for Black community solidarity, deception and 'puttin on ole massa,' white Standard English for attempts to get admitted to the social and economic 'mainstream'" (Smitherman, 1981, p. 15).

Wardhaugh (1993) has observed that ethnicity plays a part in language variation. He points out how recently African Americans also have developed interest in ethnicity and language. He cites particularly the work of Burling, 1973; Dillard, 1972; and Labov, 1972, in defining "Black English" or "Vernacular Black English."

Putting the Black culture in perspective reveals the immense gap, particularly in syntax and vocabulary, that rests in the realm of dialect usage. In personal correspondence from attorney Nathaniel S. Colley (1980), Mr. Colley writes:

Since Black children do not speak a recognized "national" language other than a vernacular version of English, neither the bilingual nor second
language approach would appear to wholly meet their special needs. . . .help from the public school in bridging the gap between the standard English in which the books and other instructional materials are written and the lectures are given, and the vernacular which they have learned at home and in their community (in Daniel, 1980, p. 298).

He went on to equate such language limitations and barriers from home and community, passed from one generation to the next, with those of foreigners.

Children must not only acquire a language but they must also learn how to use that language appropriately. Jean Piaget, for example, was not concerned merely with relating language development to cognitive development, but was also concerned with trying to discover how children use language to relate to the world and to others within the world. This is an issue that has interested many investigators and it is a profoundly important one, since language is such a crucial mediator between individuals and everything that surrounds them (Wardhaugh, 1993, p. 239).

Dr. Richard W. Bailey cites the Supreme Court case Bradley v. Milliken (433 U.S. 287 [1977]) which delineates circumstances that foster Black English.

Children who have been thus educationally and culturally set apart from the larger community will inevitably acquire habits of speech, conduct, and attitudes reflecting their speech habits, for example, which vary from the environment in which they must ultimately function and compete, if they are to enter and be a part of that community (1980, p. 104).

The Supreme Court acknowledged the existence of a dialect from the ghetto (in this case BEV) which is at odds with
the prevailing language requirements of the larger community. So both Bradley versus Millikin and the children versus Ann Arbor cases establish Black English as a legitimate register which rightfully deserves respect as such. At the college level there also is a dialect at odds with the prevailing register of academic expectations. In this study, the case studies are individuals who have been set apart, yet have acquired the discourse we call Standard.

African-American College Student

The cultural segment most clearly affected by the gap between Black English Vernacular and Standard American English is the Black college student who is striving to succeed in the "white world." Not so much the middle class Black whose skin color is the obvious difference and who has been a part of "Standard" living, but the Black who is a "stranger in a strange land" whose inhabitants speak and write in a strange tongue.

Linguists generally agree that a language is a linguistic system which a number of speakers share when different, but mutually intelligible varieties themselves are the dialects of that language. Sometimes too, one dialect may have more prestige than the others as a result of the prestige of the particular group of people who use it. People may then come to regard it as the language itself. In that case the other dialects may appear to be inferior variant of
this standard form and dialect, as a term, then assumes certain pejorative associations. (Wardhaugh, 1993, pp. 133-134).

While teaching Standard English may resemble teaching a foreign language, it must not be presented as "better than" or "superior to" their own language. Rather, it is a different dialect necessary to use in order to function well in that specific realm. Educators must appreciate what each has to offer, then build on common ground. Neither one is going to go away; nor should there be a need for total surrender.

Who can talk to whom and how easy or not it is to talk to another are important in human society in much the same way. . . . [as grooming brings animals together in a social relationship] a word of approval can have a powerful effect on a person's self-esteem and exclusion from a group can be quite damaging (Wardhaugh, 1993, p. 171).

Knowing the role of each language in one's life and at least learning style-shifting may be the best tools to help the Black student build a stable future outside the miasma of the past. Learning how to accomplish this shift must be addressed by both teachers and students.

William Labov in the 1970's observed that the "vernacular style" must not be overlooked if we are to understand the variations and changes in language behavior (Wardhaugh, 1993). While there are those who maintain that dialect does not interfere in writing (Morrow, 1985), the experiences of this researcher in teaching freshman
composition to African-American students, primarily from urban ghetto schools, reveal frequent influences from BEV which dominate their discourse. "A person's speech usually varies according to the social context in which it occurs...[but] is the systematic ability to shift from one kind of speech to another that is at the center of any study of social variation in language use" (Wardhaugh, 1993, p. 142). Speech is universal, but writing is not. Whatever we write is based upon what we speak. The primacy of speech is "a virtually undeniable fact about language" (Wardhaugh, 1993, p. 67). So a culture that relies heavily upon speaking will affect its written expression with the vernacular. Such is the case with the African-American culture and dialect.

Bidialectalism

The need for mastery of bidialectalism is apparent at the historically Black university studied. A student's knowledge of Standard English is used for placement as well as proficiency and exit testing. One can not exit the University-College until he/she can pass both a skills test and writing sample using Standard English. A student can not graduate until he/she passes the Junior English Proficiency examination. Furthermore, formal public speaking requirements necessitate use of Standard English.
The successful student who most likely uses Black English predominantly must master the ability to shift to the dialect appropriate to a particular setting. Heath (1983) describes students as ethnographers of their home habits and habits of the classroom, accepting possibilities of responding according to the rules of two systems. "In a sense, students had to learn to 'code switch' between systems... Also, facility in articulating the ways their own home communities used language, and comparing these with the ways of the school, weakened the boundary lines between systems (1983, pp. 355-6).

For me, teaching in a setting where the wide majority of African Americans employ Black discourse [80-90 percent according to Geneva Smitherman, who has served as a director at the Center for Black Studies and Professor in Speech Communication at Wayne State University in Detroit] was dramatically different. Being an individual whose native language is "white" Standard American English, I was immediately conscious of a grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure significantly different from the dialect I am accustomed to using, hearing, and reading. For me, it was reminiscent of a visit to a foreign country where the inhabitants spoke in a tongue from which only an occasional word was familiar. Time is needed to adjust to this unfamiliar language.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are used.

BASILECT - A term by William A. Stewart for the collection of linguistic features with the least prestige within a community of speakers.

BLACK ENGLISH VERNACULAR (BEV) - The non-standard language spoken in everyday life by Blacks, primarily living in urban ghettos. It is the language of the streets, the home, and informal situations; its acceptability depends upon who is using it (Dillard, 1972). Black English is anything but a simplistic language; like any linguistic system, it is filled with rules, exceptions, and various complexities which emerge over the centuries of language development. Although Black English survived primarily through oral tradition for over two hundred years, there are several accepted characteristics which identify speakers as users of Black English Vernacular.

Elizabeth Closs Traugott has found that the Black English Vernacular spoken in urban ghettos and least affected by mainstream English contains the following traits: (1) a lack of elaborate subordination structures; (2) a predominance of active sentences, even action
oriented passive ("He got himself killed" or "He got Killed" rather than "He was killed"); (3) iteration of the subject often in pronominal form as in "John he is going"; (4) occasional misuse of -s for plurals as in "foots" and double plurals as "childrens" or "mens" or no 's inflection to show possession; (5) verb aspects, particularly structure of copula, tense, and agreement with subject, especially no -s on third person singular. Examples include: "She a teacher" with copula omitted; "She happy" is to characterize her as a happy person, but "She be happy" means she is happy from time to time; omission of past tense -ed to prevent consonant cluster, so walk is past tense rather than walked (Dillard, 1972).

Substitution of d for th as in day for they and unique vocabulary words may also mark the Black English Vernacular speaker. In this study the term Black English is sometimes used to mean Black English Vernacular.

**CREOLE (Creolization)** - A language that grows out of a pidgin. When a "pidgin" evolves into the primary spoken language of a community as on a slave ship or on a plantation, it becomes a creole (possibly derived from the Portuguese crioulo which means a "Slave born in a master’s household, a house slave" (McCrum, 1986, p. 197).

**DIALECT** - a regional or cultural variety of a language.
Wardhaugh says a dialect is more a regional and less often a social variety of a language. He identifies one that a specific individual uses as an "idiolect." Sometimes a dialect is distinguished from the standard as a variety favored by the establishment (whether political, social, or religious) and supported by major social institutions. Attempts to give more exact definitions to dialect, idiolect, or even language have been rather unsuccessful (Wardhaugh, 1993).

**DIGLOSSIA** - The ability to use different languages for different purposes. The professional African American may engage in diglossia whereby he uses Standard American English to operate in the white world but Black English Vernacular to function at home, church, or neighborhood.

**NATIVE TONGUE** - The language one is born into, the one of one's family.

**PIDGIN (Pidginization)** - An auxiliary language that has no native speakers, but allows communication between people who have no common language. The *Story of English* states that "pidgin" comes from the Chinese pronunciation of *business* (from a form of English and Chinese used in seaports of China and the Straits.) Pidgin gets rid of difficult or unusual parts of language which seem strange
or hard to master. From this principle, Black English has two simplifying characteristics: (1) omitting verbs like "to be," e.g. "You out the game." (2) Dropping present tense inflections e.g. "He fast in everything he do" (McCrum, 1986, p. 197).

**STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH (SAE)** - The language of mainstream white Americans is one which has achieved official recognition in terms of having written grammatical descriptions (especially if they prescribe 'correct' usage), dictionaries, and printed works with complete exposition (not just passages of dialogue) in the language. A speaker is not ashamed to use forms of the standard dialect in public (as on the radio or on television), but he may feel subject to ridicule if he uses forms which are not recognized as standard (Dillard, 1972, pp. 303-4).

Sometimes the shortened form Standard English is used in this paper to mean SAE.

**STYLE SHIFT** - Style shifting is the movement between different phonological and syntactic rules, depending on the particular speaking context. These stylistic shifts are determined by relations of speakers and audience, especially those of power or solidarity; the broader social context, be it school, work, church, or home environment; and the topic (Labov, 1970).
The importance of this study rests in the added knowledge of how one develops language skills. This qualitative research could provide insights for children, parents, and educators toward more constructive approaches to language learning, particularly from the perspective of the students who participate in the case studies. Teachers may become more sensitive to elements at work to influence Black English and seek to discover new techniques to motivate all students toward improved communication skills.

In dealing with speakers of Black English, it is, however, frequently useful to call attention to the students’ language and to point out the differences from Standard English. Surprisingly, few of the students who have been exposed to such practices have shown any resentment, in our experience. (It is presupposed, of course, that the teacher will not call Black English ‘bad’ or ‘incorrect,’ and that he will not attribute it to any physical or genetic characteristic.) A healthy expression of interest on the part of the teacher—supposing that the interest is genuine—is a very good device for establishing rapport with the students and for making them ‘language conscious’ (Dillard, 1972, p. 292).

Maybe most important is the impact such a study might have on college faculty, for they may be the least tolerant of linguistic differences. I have a number of colleagues who use "form" for placement and assessment.
For many, proficiency in Standard English is a given—an indicator of a student's preparation or lack thereof; or even one's commitment to gaining a college education. They may come to realize that it is not so much what the elementary and secondary schools failed to do, but what one's environment is more greatly empowered to do. While this study focuses on four case studies, the original ten cases held common influences and experiences.

We do not always know what we are doing when we involve ourselves in issues having to do with language. In fact, in retrospect, we can see that much we do may be quite misguided because we have failed to identify genuine issues, or have asked quite inappropriate questions, or have been unable to recognize the relevant facts. Only when we understand what language is like and what a unique place it has in our lives will we have any real hope of solving pressing issues that have to do with language. Language is a unique phenomenon in the world and our last hope for success in handling issues that have to do with it lies in our acknowledging just how special it is and finding interesting questions to ask about it (Wardhaugh, 1993, p. 248).

Discovering the enabling factors of those who can make the style shift from Black English Vernacular to Standard American English may inspire creative approaches to foster similar development for those victims of language bias and pariah labeling. Delpit (1983) maintains a more just society will come only when all students are taught the rules of power. Hopefully, non-standard speakers and
writers will be able to navigate the head winds and rough currents, and rather than capsize and drown, paddle the mainstream.
CHAPTER II
SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Background

In order to understand what enables a nonstandard speaker to acquire standard English, one must appreciate the motivational elements which prompt the speaker to develop the associated skills. Various studies have provided insights into instructional methods and needs that facilitate such learning.

Numerous scholars from the 1960’s through 1993 have studied various influences, characteristics, and developments in the discourse of African Americans. Important to this study are five areas which seem to impact the acquisition of Standard English by those whose native tongue is Black English Vernacular:

(1) Different and often conflicting cultures
(2) Oral traditions
(3) Negative attitudes
(4) Bidialectalism
(5) Language instruction

There remains some doubt whether all speakers of Black
English require proficiency in SAE dialect. Some African Americans see Standard English as a negative force designed to denigrate the Black culture even further. The Black Power Movement at times is accompanied by a deliberate rejection of the white dialect, and the effort to use Black dialect provides a certain pride, offering the prospects of elevating the Black culture (Smitherman, 1981; Heath, 1983).

A major negative factor continues with racial discrimination. The experiences related to growing up Black are dramatically different from the experiences of a white standard-speaking child. The isolation of the Black children in the ghetto culture where the mother tongue BEV shapes the language builds a barrier to the acquisition of SAE. The BEV of Black children is not the language used in school (Heath, 1983; Kozol, 1991; Burgess, 1992; Harris, 1993).

The teacher can play a major role in the acculturation of the child, leading to an appreciation of the structure, the use, and the legitimacy of both the BEV, which the student brings with him/her, and SAE, which is the language of public education and the key to success in mainstream culture (Heath, 1983; Adler, 1984; Delpit, 1988).
Educators and other intermediaries must offer positive influences to facilitate learning the dialect used in school.

Black culture is essentially an oral society (Linn, 1975; McCrum, 1986). The multifarious differences from street speech, divergent speakers, a unique vocabulary, stigmas, and deficit theories combine as an obstacle to standardization. Even theories of the history and development of Black English only affirm the existence of obstacles to mastering SAE and lend little help to solving the problem of discourse gaps.

With the co-existence of such powerful language forces as BEV and SAE may come a linguistic compromise resulting in bidialectalism. Code-switching is practiced by scores of successful people who recognize the appropriateness and necessity of a particular dialect for a given setting and audience. Bidialectalism permits successful functioning in the dominant society and dialect while preserving the dignity and unique qualities of the Black culture (Adler, 1984).

Different and Often Conflicting Cultures

Robert L. Green (1980) observed that more than a century after the Civil War and over twenty-five years after the laws making segregation illegal, "... America
still permits racial injustice to stalk the land. Discrimination infects all of our institutions and, consequently, makes the experience of growing up Black quantitatively and qualitatively different from that of growing up white" (p. 239). The public schools are among those institutions that foster this discrimination, where "... tests can serve as a convenient tool for rationalizing discriminatory practices" (p. 238).

Geneva Smitherman (in Judy, 1979) urges English/language arts teachers to work for change in attitudes about dialects, wherever possible, to stop language as a device of oppression but instead to achieve cultural pluralism and a "humane social universe" (p. 74). Even though most students spend twelve years in a school environment where SAE is the language, the majority who begin school speaking nonstandard English leave without acquiring SAE. The cultural conflict between the schoolroom and the outside nonstandard realm is one possible explanation.

Attesting further to the wide gap between Black and white cultures, Farr and Daniels (1986) state,

Instruction in literacy, then, for those students who do not come from mainstream culture, is partially a matter of acculturation to mainstream culture. Many of the difficulties that such students have in succeeding, and becoming
literate, in school can be explained by the complexity of the difference between their home culture and the school culture (p. 31).

Too many children attend inferior schools persistently segregated by income and race; without intervention Black children will fall further behind (Harris, 1993).

The influence of teacher expectations is remarkable in all this conflict. According to Chunn (1989) research has shown that kindergarten teachers held lower expectations for Black students who spoke BEV and expected higher academic activities from those Blacks who spoke SAE. Both race and dialect of Black children might result in negative assessment of how they perform as well as where their personalities and abilities are (Chunn, 1989). Necessary for the success of African American students are committed, caring, dedicated teachers who establish a supportive relationship with the students to allow solutions and intervention to emerge (Jordan, 1990).

Demerest (1969) stated that English teachers have a particularly difficult problem; they must adhere to the rules of correct grammar without making the student feel his own is inferior. Keller (1976) states that the purpose of education in the United States is to teach a second, non-colloquial register of English.

Knowledge of Standard American English
Walter A. Wolfram (1969) defined Standard English as "a codified norm of 'correction.' Nonstandard English is defined as any variety of English which differs from this established norm" (p. 17). Acquisition of Standard American English grammar is an important goal of literacy instruction and therefore an essential step to enter the mainstream (Farr & Daniels 1986). Standard American English is almost always considered essential to operate successfully in American society.

Certainly, Standard English is the language of American schools. In the study of language learning in Rosepoint, Louisiana, Martha Ward (1971) recognized the difference between schoolroom expectations and a child's background and experience. Discourse differences and learning problems are likely to occur any place that does not conform to middle class culture. Just as in the Rosapoint homes where written word is almost non-existent, the urban ghetto may foster development of children for whom reading and writing are unimportant. So children from homes where literacy is unimportant are likely to have problems using the language of the schools (Heath, 1983; Harris, 1993).

However, some educators have doubts about the necessity for all students to master the standard dialect. In his
study exploring writing error and Black English style shifting, Daniel Morrow (1986) inquired whether various dialects affected acquisition of basic skills.

He questioned whether mastery of Standard American English was essential to success in school or merely the mode of behavior which pleased teachers rather than produced a necessity to learning. While standard is the language of textbooks, its correct use may carry too much power in evaluating an individual’s achievement. Thomas Kochman (1970) takes the somewhat controversial stand that it is futile to try teaching SAE with the desire and cooperation of the non-standard speakers. SAE is probably unnecessary in their lives. He says it is color, not language, that is hurting them.

William Labov (1969) asserted

All too often, "standard English" is represented by a style that is simultaneously overly-particular and vague. The accumulating flow of words buries rather than strikes the target. It is this verbosity which is most easily taught and most easily learned, so that words take the place of thought, and nothing can be found behind them (pp. 27-28).

Therefore, using Standard English becomes a type of gamesmanship where using many words to say very little is more desirable than communicating an idea to someone else. It is form, not content, that counts.
Black English and its Use

Using the term "Black English" began in the late 1960's as an attempt to avoid the pejorative connotation of expressions like "Negro dialect" and "Nonstandard Negro English." While it is debatable whether Black English is diverging or converging, it is not dying out (Wolfram and Christian, 1989).

R. W. Reising (1974) affirms the legitimacy of the Black dialect as one worthy of respect with its own structure and value. Starting with authorities such as J. L. Dillard (1972), then further clarification by Kenneth R. Johnson and Herbert D. Simon, linguists see Black English as its own language, not something deficient. Correctness is then relative to the language appropriate to the speaker, audience, and situation.

Brasch (1981) describes William Smith's 1744 account in A New Voyage to Guinea which documents how slave owners separated groups of Blacks with the same culture and language to prevent communication and possible revolt. Traders, however, did not realize that Africans had already developed a pidgin English for trade which in turn became a Creole with several varieties. So Black English may be closer to West African Pidgin English than to Standard American English. Dr. Jerrie Scott (1980) asserted the dominant view that Black English stems from Afro-English
Creole and is governed by rules. This same acknowledgement of Black English as a legitimate language with its own rules, vocabulary, and grammar was previously discussed by Labov and Cohen (1967), Tasold and Wolfram (1970), Steward (1965), and Shuy (1965). J. L. Dillard says 80 percent of the Black population speak Black English.

Kenneth R. Johnson (1971) also emphasizes that differences are not deficiencies. Nor are children who speak Black English non-verbal. Hannerz (1968), in an anthropological approach studying ghetto society, proclaims that proficiency in Black English merits considerable status in Black society. Abrahams (1970) says that a Black child needs his Black English to be part of the Black culture.

**Oral Tradition**

Like their African ancestors, Black Americans are an oral people. The most revered member in African society was the elder or *alkali* who kept traditions and history in his head. In American Black society, he might be a preacher or someone on a street corner (McCrum, 1986). Preservation of the oral tradition was vital for understanding African culture. The expressive word was the basis of their society, according to Arthur L. Smith (1972). In fact, the various examples of Black English
Vernacular which comprise the Black speech community are so expressive and animated that writing alone makes it almost impossible to understand completely.

Undoubtedly, the differences of the oral language of African Americans give them reasons to feel isolation in discourse activities. The composition teacher must be sure the BEV writer realizes that use of standard English does not mean rejection of his culture and adoption of white middle class standards. SAE is to help his formal written code, but not to reject his oral code (Linn, 1975). Rejection adds to the isolated feeling which has prompted such drastic suggestions as some Blacks proposing the conversion of Mississippi into a Black nation (Keller, 1976).

Gordon Green (1972) called the Negro dialect the last social barrier to integration. "The Negro dialect is an anachronism hanging on from the segregated living conditions of plantation life in pre-Civil War days" (p. 15). Just as Liza Doolittle's loss of Cockney heightened her status in Pygmalion, so the "destruction" of the Negro dialect will break the last chain that binds Blacks to the past. Now twenty years later BEV remains an "albatross" inhibiting fair treatment and acceptance of African Americans. Anthony Burgess (1992) also acknowledges the prejudice that exists toward the ghetto speech of African
Americans. Whatever changes have occurred in attitudes about the acceptability of dialects like BEV, there remains a negative frame of mind toward the register used by many African Americans.

Walter Brasch (1981) presented a five-cycle theory of Black English and its historical development in his hypothesis that what appeared in the mass media is the only strong evidence verifying the existence of Black English. The five cycles are (1) Colonial-Revolutionary c.1765-c.1800; (2) Antebellum c.1820-c.1860; (3) Reconstruction Cycle c.1867-c.1902; (4) Negro Renaissance c.1915-c.1940; (5) Civil Rights c.1958-the present.

For blacks as a whole, the question of dialect loyalty has been cast against a backdrop of poverty and other isolating factors. For many the first steps out of the ghetto came in the form of adopting the norms of more successful Americans. The negative attitudes toward black speech are largely responsible for the stylistic variation that thrives in all black American communities, but it would be wrong to suggest that most street speakers exhibit identical styles (Baugh, 1983, p. 7).

He calls this a "chameleon quality." This theory of Black English and its development, along with its ever-changing quality, reveal a basic instability about the dialect. Such instability only muddies attempts to understand the foundation of BEV. It also associates BEV as a dialect of ignorance (Baugh, 1983).

Farr and Janda (1983) assert that most language used is
oraly based, and research of oral language is important to expand linguistic capacities for effective writing. The oral tradition of Black English is a rich heritage but also most difficult to trace, preventing a thorough knowledge of history of the language and its structure. So presenting Black English's development as a language is difficult to see.

The Mother Tongue

Scholars like Labov (1972) observed that the Black child exists and functions successfully in his own communication setting.

Inner-city Black children have been described as non-verbal because the school setting does not allow them to express themselves in the ways they are accustomed to . . . . The Black child does not speak "improper English"; he speaks a different language stigmatized and devalorized by the school where the standard variety is the only language of instruction (Hamers & Blanc, 1983, p. 210).

More recently, Hamers and Blanc (1983) note that use of the mother tongue in the home is important to a culture, but it may interfere with children achieving academic success. "It is the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group, the use of the mother tongue in the home and in the community, and the allegiance to the cultural group that will ensure cultural survival" (p. 209). Some had
maintained when a child's mother tongue is non-standard, like BEV, bidialectal proficiency is doubtful because of linguistic deficiency (Hamers & Blanc, 1983).

In her study of society's construction of literacy, Jenny Cook-Gumperz recognizes the preeminence of language--"the medium of all educational exchange. While other factors have been acknowledged as important for school success, language differences have often until recently been overlooked as incidental handicaps to the learning process" (1986, pp. 7-8). But verbal exchange is the essential part of the learning process; these differences become the major point of concern. "Children may come to school as competent speakers of language, but their competence takes the form of a variety of dialects. What these dialects are affects the way children are judged, not only in their speaking performance but also in matters of attitude and motivation" (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 8).

Since these judgments are important at this university to determine placement and ultimately graduation, and later the way individuals in power positions evaluate individuals, this study to help understand language acquisition may contribute to future educational programs.

Street Speech
Harris (1989) noted that our writing is not that of an individual, but that of a member of a community whose influences determine what we say. Our writing is not uniquely our own but a product of our communities. Harris cited an example of a young Black woman from Philadelphia who explained that she used a Southern-inflected speech with older family members and a street talk with friends. In contrast to these private languages, she also had a public language which was problematic for her. She was referring to Standard English, the spoken and written language enjoying cultural prestige and necessary for professional advancement. Recognizing the need to master this public language, she did not want to cast out the private language and identity of her family, friends, and culture, thus illustrating dialect choice to suit the audience and situation.

Baugh (1983) warns that examining style shifts in Black street speech may be very sensitive

... while there are increasing numbers of black scholars working on several minority-related issues, this population is still quite sparse when compared to the majority of blacks who are outside the academic arena—by choice, chance, or design. ... the most reliable evidence on street speech cannot be found by listening to the linguistic experts. ... we must learn about the language from the isolated population which has little or no access to the academic community. The dynamics of street speech can be
derived only from life in the home community, and ultimately this requires the cooperation of Black people themselves (pp. 34-35).

The accompanying sense of alienation of African Americans results in less likelihood of their cooperation or even concern about language research.

Rapping, the prevailing musical "talking" performance vehicle of Blacks, has long been an important conversation device in the Black community. It was used in the beginning of a relationship in hopes of making a favorable impression, often by a man seeking to make sexual advances on a woman (Kochman, 1970).

Kochman (1970) said that Blacks have a special language to use with mainstream culture or Whites ("the man") "shucking" or "jiving" and a different language behavior practiced among peers, probably a good survival strategy. This special language served to exclude the white man from knowing exactly what the Blacks were saying, the same way Blacks had been excluded from the mainstream culture. At first in the South, and later the North, the Blacks recognized their restrictive status and "staying in their place." Showing feelings of frustration, indignation, pride, discontent or desire in front of white people was not acceptable: "that real feelings had to be concealed behind a mask of innocence, ignorance, childishness, obedience, humility, and deference" (p. 65). The Blacks
used the terms "tomming" or "jeffing" to describe the role played in front of white folks in the South. "Failure to accommodate the white southerner in this respect was almost certain to invite psychological and often physical brutality" (p. 65).

At the end of the 19th century, Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) wrote of the mask which Blacks wore to conceal their real thoughts and feelings from "torn and bleeding hearts," hiding their "tears and sighs" and "cries . . . from tortured souls."

We wear the Mask
We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes--
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, 0 great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile,
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Street speech survives because there is a segment of population for whom it is the appropriate style for their everyday needs (Baugh, 1983). Labov (1969) and Burgess (1992) point out that linguists who work with non-standard Negro English acknowledge it as a different system, closely related to SAE, but separated from white dialect.
Hannerz (1968) adds to the language knowledge to express an "essential Negroness" and an appreciation for it; "soul" has emerged from the Black urban ghetto to provide solidarity and some alternative ideals of achievement. Street speech bonds some African Americans with a communication vehicle that is exclusively theirs. All this information shows that the vernacular is an integral and powerful segment of Black culture and should be respected and appreciated.

**Divergent Speakers**

Goodman (1965) calls the child who speaks a different dialect from that of the school the "divergent speaker," a neutral term that avoids negative labeling. While people might not consciously reject a child for most surface qualities, they often readily reject his language which is far more damaging because it casts out his means of communication and self-expression.

According to Smitherman (1974), even the highly educated were departing from Latinate rules, and the "standard" shifted to the type of English in use among the socially acceptable. But the new standard once again excluded: "It wasn't never no meltin pot" (p. 68). A considerable amount of divergency in language and culture
was lost. Smitherman observes the flux within language and the exclusion of the African-American elements to an acceptable role.

Goodman (1965) sees the only practical solution is the school’s and teacher’s acceptance of the language the learner brings to school. Below are important aspects of this approach:

(1) Literacy is built on the base of the child’s existing language.

(2) This base must be a solid one. Children must be helped to develop a pride in their language and confidence in their ability to use their language to communicate their ideas and express themselves.

(3) In reading instruction the focus must be on learning to read. No attempt to change the child’s language must be permitted to enter into this process or interfere with it.

(4) No special materials need to be constructed, but children must be permitted, actually encouraged, to read the way they speak. Experience stories must basically be in their language.

(5) Any skill instruction must be based on a careful analysis of their language.

(6) Reading materials and reading instruction should draw as much as possible on experiences and settings appropriate to the children. While special dialect-based materials are impractical, we may nonetheless need to abandon our notion of universally usable reading texts and use a variety of materials selected for suitability for the particular group of learners.

(7) The teacher will speak in his own natural manner and present by example the general language community, but the teacher must learn to
understand and accept the children's language. He must study it carefully and become aware of the key elements of divergence that are likely to cause difficulty. Langston Hughes has suggested an apt motto for the teacher of divergent speakers: "My motto as I live and learn, is dig, and be dug in return" (pp. 274-275).

Despite such acceptance of a divergent dialect, there are still many who look with disdain on those whose spoken language is less than standard. Henry Mitchell (1970) points out that no language is improper among its own speakers since it allows communication, the job for which language exists. For a number of reasons, though, scholars like Anthony Burgess (1992) believe there is one proper Standard American English, and view the Black English Vernacular as a crude distortion of it.

**Negative Attitudes**

**Cultural Genocide**

Requiring the use of the standard must be at the expense of the vernacular, according to Keller. Such removal of the vernacular, a community's repertoire, "would entail the effacement of that group's social identity—and no community would willingly subject itself to cultural genocide" (Keller, 1976, p. 24). Verbal strength may be as important as physical strength. Whether it is "sounding" or "signifying" or "playing the dozens" (a verbal insult
game) or "rapping or "shucking and jiving," language is an essential element of the street culture, and it allows a degree of identity and dignity for African Americans (Kochman, 1970). This researcher's observation is that the vernacular is so ingrained in conversations of African Americans that its use is not to exclude outsiders, but simply the natural mode of expression. Here again the significance of bidialectalism surfaces to preserve the Black culture while sharing the power that Delpit examines (1988).

Knowledge and preservation of the oral tradition is an integral part of Black culture. "With an African heritage steeped in oral tradition and the acceptance of transforming vocal communication, the Afro-American developed a consummate skill in using language to produce alternate communication patterns to those employed in his American situation" (Smith, 1972, p. 297). Some of these channels of the communication process remain either consciously or subconsciously. During slavery, communication was very difficult between the various tribe members and cultures. Alternate means of communication emerged because of the high regard by almost all Africans for the spoken word through such vehicles as sermons, work songs, and spirituals with meanings for body and soul.
It is precisely the power of the word whether in music or in speeches in today's Black society that authority speaks of an African past. Thus to omit black rhetoric as manifest in speeches and songs from any proper investigation of black history is to ignore the essential ingredient in the making of black drama (Smith, 1972, p. 297).

Even in formal speeches assigned in the Freshman English core, students often employ BEV seemingly to assure acceptance by their peer group.

"To lose one's language is to lose one's identity."

And that language is learned best by living and identifying with those who speak it, those socially closest rather than those they may hear most, such as a teacher or television (Mitchell, 1972, p. 89). A notable exception may be the many Black clergy whose language is largely SAE, but punctuated with power or emphasis on even unimportant words for dramatic effect.

As Arthur Smith (1972) writes:

Everything appears to have rested upon the life-giving power of the word, life, death, disease, health, and, as the career of Nat Turner demonstrates, even liberation. For the word could not be considered static; it was then and is now dynamic and generative. Actually this concept embodies the idea of incantation as transformation; vocal expression reigns supreme (p. 296).

The Africans even have a word "nommo" which means the generative and dynamic quality of vocal expression. It is this same stress on the spoken word of their culture which results in problems in the formal composition in which the
students seek to write the way they speak. Although others maintain use of oral language does not affect written use (Farr and Janda, 1985; Morrow, 1985), the dialect of African Americans must be respected and provide reason for bidialectalism.

**Deficit Theory**

Baugh (1983) comments that people argue that a non-standard dialect is important to the identity of a culture; others view Black English vernacular as a barrier to success. Either way, Baugh asserts that Black Americans speak some of the most non-standard English spoken in the world. Steward (1965) refers to the topmost dialect, the one closest to Standard English as "aerolect"; "basilect" is his term for the lowest form in the hierarchy, the one farthest removed from SAE (p. 163).

The prevailing position in American academic and business society considers Black English as a deficit form of SAE which resulted from separation and deprivation (Simpkins & Simpkins, 1980; Burgess, 1992). For this researcher from the mainstream culture, Black discourse is often so distanced from Standard English that it is barely recognizable. Demographics reveal that many African Americans dwell in the isolation and poverty of urban ghettos. In *Black English and the Mass Media*, Walter
Brasch presents the basic aspects of the Deficit Theory, sometimes known by the Theory of Verbal Deficiency. Cultural deprivation causes the BEV speaker both linguistic and cognitive deficiencies. Proponents of this thinking believe "cognition is restricted because Black English is a deficient language; not only is it not a complete language, but it is substandard as well" (Brasch, 1981, p. xxii). These deficit theorists further equate BEV with low-class status and claim that the shackles of Black English must be cast away if a Black wishes to make any advancement in society. Many colleagues as well as guest speakers, who represent success in the world beyond our university, preach the value and necessity of mastering SAE. Many believe that standard English is the only correct and acceptable, or "proper," language for Americans. "Black English, as well as any nonstandard dialect, is therefore considered to be "poor," "sloppy," or "substandard" English" (p. xxiii). Twelve years later the same attitudes of inferiority toward African-American culture and language exist (Burgess, 1992; Wardhaugh, 1993).

**Stigma**

Demerest (1969) addresses the stigmatizing factor of being Black. "Every black kid can tell you his own horror stories about the times teachers warned him that it is not
nice to act too black in the class" (p. 4). And it is common for students to be advised to pursue carpentry or mechanical skills in lieu of a career in law. Hannerz (1968) portrays the political powerlessness of Black ghetto dwellers. The derogation is further noted by John Baugh (1983) who reported the negative reaction to street speech throughout his public education and college training. In contrast, his personal experiences contradicted the thinking that speakers of BEV were inherently ignorant.

An added element of trouble exists for the Black male from the attitudes toward SAE and BEV. According to Abrahams (in his unpublished manuscript "Afro-American Language and Culture in the Classroom," the worst aspects of Black English are associated with the Black male. "A variety of Black English close to standard thus has come to be identified with the feminine world by both men and women; conversely, the blackest elements of Black English are associated with men" (p. 6). So Standard English is not the manly thing to speak. On a campus where athletics prevail and "jocks" are most admired, the macho Black male employs a non-standard language that often is admired and emulated, yet quite unlike that expected in the academic community.

Shaughnessy (1977) further reports the negative views toward the dialect:
... the young, no matter how hard they try to resist the interpretations that the world imposes on them, tend eventually to absorb negative views of their language that in turn make it even more difficult to learn formal English. The black student has probably felt the bite of prejudice more persistently and deeply than anyone else, which may in itself be justification enough for introducing him to the dialect he speaks, pointing out its validity as a language in certain contexts, and contrasting it in systematic ways with the dialect he has not yet mastered (p. 157).

This view is recently presented in Burgess (1992) and Wardhaugh (1993). Consequently, a precarious balance results between the language the African Americans have long employed and the one from the mainstream which has denigrated them and their dialect.

Even Edwin Newman, popular author of Strictly Speaking: Will America be the Death of English? (1974), refers to "y'know" [frequently used in BEV] as what he calls "one of the most far-reaching and depressing developments of our time, disfiguring conversation wherever you go" (p. 27). Newman has had a keen awareness of American language and its decline of standards.

Bidialectalism

Solutions

Bidialectalism for minority children is designed to prepare them for later success in the dominant language, not proficiency in their mother tongue (Hamers & Blanc,
Three types of solution to bidialectalism which have been proposed:

(1) creating compensatory programs based on the idea of linguistic deficit aiming to change a child's language to what is "proper."

(2) developing bidialectal programs in which a child uses SAE at school and the vernacular at home.

(3) trying to reduce the prejudice held by the dominant group standard speakers.

Regardless of the approach, according to Baratz (1972), Black students must learn Standard English to insure competence in reading and writing the Standard English which is necessary to succeed in U. S. society. Instead of teaching one as right and the other as wrong, self-esteem may be preserved if dialects are characterized as different. Many of our students have learned "language difference" rather than Black English as inferior. This approach helps reduce the disadvantage of "inferiority" labeling.

There are numerous problems facing bidialectal education, not the least is reeducating teachers to help children feel good about their vernacular. An ideal model would include instruction in both the dominant and
subordinate languages, but it is doubtful such a solution could ever be put into practice (Hamers and Blanc, 1983).

Smitherman cites the hypocrisy of telling children their language is acceptable in their culture, but not in school and the rest of society. "That's how come Black folk bees so schizophrenic-seemin', all time havin' to front and mask, go through linguistic and other kind of changes round whites" (1970, p. 70). Delpit (1988) sees this in society generally and in education specifically.

Even Geneva Smitherman, with her integration of Black dialect into usage, recognizes the need for Blacks to acquire the standard to enable them to gain "socioeconomic mobility" ("Talkin'and Testifyin'about Black Dialect," 1974, p. 69). She also notes that bidialectalism overlooks operating in the power scene in America. In 1977, Smitherman acknowledged the implications that Black English is unacceptable to most of society. "Again, the victims become culpable for the crime, for though poverty and racism created and sustained the economically impoverished position of blacks, (p. 208) it is the Blacks who must change, who must surrender their culture and language. So Smitherman notes that even the coexistence of two dialects ultimately means that BE must be surrendered by those who want to thrive in the powerful mainstream. Delpit (1988), however, thinks teachers must teach children the rules of
power and how to use them, rather than sacrificing them.
This researcher has observed that use of BEV by popular entertainers and sports figures seems to contribute an air of legitimacy to the Black dialect and recognition of different language for different situations, so again bidialectalism becomes viable.

**Code Switching**

Heath (1983) acknowledged that because the students were able to function by the rules of more than one system, they engaged in code switching. So neither the home community nor the school setting have to be sacrificed. Farr and Daniels (1986) point out that many scholars propose "bidialectalism" as a goal in education since both standard and non-standard dialects have validity. Furthermore, if an individual learns a second dialect, it gives him two systems for both oral and written communication. John Gumperz (1986) notes the requirements in the work place and other public settings necessitate many Black speakers to use standard English while a kind of power struggle and cultural identity prompts use of Black English preventing total linguistic assimilation.

Baugh (1982) maintains that bidialectalism is very difficult to master because of the closeness of the standard and non-standard street speech; "...it is very difficult to master the standard as a second dialect of
the native vernacular. The task also seems to get more
difficult with age" (p. 58). My observation, though, is
that some vocabulary and pronunciation is quite different
from SAE.

William Labov (1969) writes, however, that nonstandard
vernacular is no obstacle to learning. Ignorance of
language is the chief problem. Teachers must not view the
language of the Black child as inferior and indicative of
IQ deficiency. Nothing good can come from that view. The
children are the victims of this ignorance and it must not
be tolerated. "It may seem that the fallacies of the
verbal deprivation theory are so obvious that they are
hardly worth exposing; I have tried to show that it is an
important job for us to undertake." (p. 43).

Labov and Harris (1983) confirm it is not the schools
or the media that make the big impact on language, but
friends and competition that affect us, "those speakers who
engage in structural interaction with whites, where they
use language to negotiate their position or gain
advantages, show a profound shift of their grammatical
rules" (p. 23). It is this very ability that drew my
attention to the type of students who eventually became
the subjects for these case studies. In fact, by the time
children arrive at school, the base has already been
established. Language is used in the context of
community, and a rather complete system develops by age 5 or 6, with only minor adjustments occurring for the next 2 or 3 years (Wolfram, 1970). DeStefano suggests that the bidialectalism approach is another form of racism requiring the Black child to learn to "talk white" because his Black English Vernacular is not good enough (1973). Whether it is the vernacular native tongue itself or the larger society's stigmatizing of Black English, the speaker of BEV faces obstacles to master SAE.

Language Instruction

Bokamba (1981) advocated that Black English should be appreciated as a subject and language of instruction at least through junior high. Subjects such as civics, reading, and language arts could be taught in Standard English. This bidialectal policy should be given careful consideration by educators and linguists.

Given the fact that Black English is the dialect spoken by the vast majority of Black children in the United States before their schooling in Standard English, the adoption of the policy suggested here cannot fail to improve their academic performance and other developmental opportunities (p. 287).

What would be taught about BE itself might be determined by an instructor who understood and used BEV as well as SAE. Since BE is primarily rooted in an oral tradition, analysis of actual words and syntax used in
conversation could be examined to arrive at mutual comprehension by both BEV and SAE speakers.

O'Donnell (1982) discussed the state of research in English education in the 1980's. He acknowledged the growing numbers in the United States whose native language was not English. Both ESL students and those learning Standard English as a second dialect make research a necessity to discover how to develop instructional programs. According to O'Donnell, this is an area of needed research "to help us understand the differences as well as the similarities and to develop effective instructional methods and materials for students in these categories" (p. 132). O'Donnell (1982) states that ESL has received less attention in the United States than elsewhere, but larger ESL population necessitates more research to identify problems, solutions, and instructional methods.

Speakers of Black English as a native language face some of the same problems as those speakers who speak a language completely different from English. Robert Politzer (1968) acknowledges that modifications of the foreign language approach are necessary in dealing with speakers of Black English because SAE presents a different language situation. He says that speakers of Black English are not native speakers of Standard American
English, yet they are expected to learn to read and operate by rules of standard English. With its unique grammar and vocabulary, BEV resembles a foreign language, so some of the ESL methods might be appropriate.

Politzer concludes there are certain qualifications for a foreign language teacher: language proficiency, knowledge of the culture, understanding how native language interferes, and methodology. The "foreign language" would be "standard English." "The teacher of standard English should have a thorough and linguistically accurate knowledge of the instruction of the language which he is teaching, and a clear perception of the differences between speech and writing" (p. 248). He must also recognize a student’s dialect as a legitimate communication system; refusing to acknowledge a student’s native tongue may be denial of the student’s only means of communication. In recent years more African American students have arrived at college with the philosophy that one dialect is not inferior to another. This attitude is healthy in its preservation of the esteem of their culture, just so it does not foster an obstinacy against using the Standard dialect.

*Teachers of Black Children*

Roger Shuy (1971) stated that teachers are not prepared
to deal with minority language problems. The universities need to provide information to enable teachers to deal with such problems. He also noted that very little had been done about teacher language, particularly an assessment of the teacher's speech relative to the speech of the children they teach. He advised an overhauling of teacher training programs. Recently, Kozol (1991) notes that problems in public education are getting worse.

While students at an historically Black college are often taught SAE without degrading their dialect, instruction at mainstream colleges and universities stress SAE as "correct," and dialects like BEV or Appalachian are viewed as those used by people who don't know any better—the "uneducated."

St. Clair Drake (1965) discussed the victimization of Black ghetto inhabitants; despite some gains, the middle class Blacks represent a "skimming of the cream," further robbing lower class blacks of power. Baugh (1983) draws a parallel between Black vernacular and Cockney, which is looked down upon by British society. Realizing that speakers of BEV are in effect victimized by their dialect is important for the teacher to understand the culture of her students (Drake, p. 64).

In "Language in the Classroom: Studies of the Pygmalion Effect," Frederick Williams and Jack L. Whitehead
(1971) discovered important insights into the teachers of Black children. Too often teachers judge differences as deficits. "Perhaps too much is stressed about the objective of teaching (and expecting) Standard English rather than the careful diagnosis of existing linguistic capabilities of children as a starting point" (p. 175). They further contend that English instruction could be improved if language differences in children were understood. Teachers must be trained to be sensitive and objective toward language differences. "As Eliza Doolittle counseled Professor Higgins, it is how you treat people that makes them what they are to you. The same advice seems pertinent to the reduction of teachers' negative stereotypes of children who speak nonstandard English" (p. 175). This attitude change would have positive influence on language development, but sensitivity by teachers is not exclusive to only the language arts discipline.

Mary Dilworth (1989) acknowledges the long-standing tradition of excellence of Black teachers and the alarming reduction in numbers who have been so important in educating Blacks. New requirements of five years to get a teaching degree, and the resultant additional year along
with cuts in financial aid may hinder Blacks from becoming educators. Steps must be taken to protect multiethnicity in the teaching force.

I personally take any opportunity to encourage African-American students to consider teaching careers, particularly capable Black males. African-American children are especially in need of good Black male role-models to compensate for some of the needs of single-parent homes.

Home Influences

Recognizing the influence of the home is essential; Moffett (1980) says that the home is more important for reading achievement than anything done in school. It is also the origin of speech. In recent years both Houses of the U. S. Congress have recognized that actions against retrenchment from early education programs must be taken. The committee for Economic Development, an independent research and educational organization, has called for full federal funding of Chapter 1 and Head Start to reach levels adequate to serve all eligible children. These solutions must reach not only the school system but also the child's environment. Early, continual intervention is required both in and out of school to break the "cycle of
disaffection and despair" (Smith, 1989, p. 50). One of the areas to be explored in case study interviews is the role of reading in the home and family.

Reading Writing, 'rithmetic Difficulties

The dialect of the academic SAE world starting in the primary grades through high school and college is at odds with the natural dialect of many African-American students. This language gap makes explanations and information presented by teachers difficult to understand. It also makes a student insecure about the use of this "foreign" dialect, particularly in writing. For example, my college freshmen generally prefer talking or presenting speeches to avoid that which makes one feel inferior or inadequate.

Linn (1975) wrote that early in their education Black students learn they must not write the same way they speak. Consequently, many Blacks have an insecurity or fear about composition before they get to college and believe they are unable to write.

Shaughnessy (1977) said for the non-mainstream pupil, "academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. . . .[W]riting is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn’t know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer’s eyes, searching for
flaws" (p. 7). Smitherman (1974) points out how some Black kids translate the printed word into the vernacular when reading. This often creates homophonic pairs, such as "they're" and "their" which will not matter in speech, but will cause an error in writing.

Kenneth Goodman (1965) wrote that the language of one's home environment is the mother tongue, the one most deeply rooted as a means of communication. So learning a different dialect is much harder than learning his own. "The more divergence there is between the dialect of the learner and the dialect of learning, the more difficult will be the task of learning to read" (p. 266).

Eleanor Orr (1987) traces how difference between SAE and BEV can influence a BEV speaker's understanding of mathematical relations" (p. 9). Many of the problems her students were having with math were based on language. In Twice as Less, Orr demonstrates how students' misunderstandings of certain quantitative relations stem from non-standard use of prepositions related to their use of BEV. Further, she shows their combining of as and than for comparisons resulting in an inability to distinguish between addition and multiplication and between subtraction and division, thus a confusion between twice and half. Orr states that students who use BEV as their first language experience language as a barrier to success
in science and mathematics. A student may use in when the situation calls for for. As an example, saying one traveled for less time instead he traveled in less time results in mistaking a shorter distance for a greater speed. Consequently, speakers of non-standard dialect like BEV have difficulty learning not only SAE but other subjects such as math and science which are taught in SAE.

Language Acquisition

In 1982 the Pentagon announced that African-American students had scored low on tests in both math and language skills. In response to the Pentagon’s announcement about poor test results for Blacks, William Raspberry said,

When America saw itself slipping behind the Soviets in math and science, it was treated as a national emergency, and something was done about it. But those were white kids, and questions of genetic deficiency never arose. The assumption was that the kids could learn what we needed them to know if we would only get about teaching them...

The same assumption ought to be made with regard to black children today. Instead of chopping funds for special education programs, we ought to be looking for ways to make them vastly more effective...

It would be worth all the embarrassment if Reagan would see last weekend’s revelations as evidence of the need to declare black education a national emergency and undertake to do something to improve it (1982).

Not only are we in danger of losing much that was gained for minority children in the 60’s and 70’s, but the
problems of the economy may cause serious setbacks through the 90's into the next century (Barnett, 1984).

A child is born with a natural inclination to acquire the language of his surrounding. By the age of 30 months a child has a vocabulary of over 1000 words with a passive vocabulary two or three times that large. Language habits are hard to change past childhood (Bokamba, 1980). What makes it hard to change nonstandard features is that they are deeply ingrained in one's internal language system. Even despite desire to change, it is difficult to alter through direct teaching (Farr & Daniels, 1986).

If Bokamba (1980) is right, the college-age student has little hope of acquiring SAE. Often the learning environment of inner city schools is a chaotic wasteland filled with drugs, crime, and violence. Special programs to help students have disappeared in "bare bones" educational offerings stemming from economic catastrophe. Even in a college classroom which requires SAE to conduct its business of learning, students need constant correction and reinforcement to try to acquire SAE. Returning to long held dialect habits is the rule, not the exception.

Effective Teaching of Standard English

Abrahams (1970), Labov (1969), DeStefano (1973), Drake
(1965), and many others emphasize the importance for teachers to understand the culture and patterns of BEV used by the Black ghetto children if the teachers are going to be effective. Wolfram (1970) wrote that the most effective teaching of Standard English was based on the understanding of the distinctive differences between standard and nonstandard dialects. He certainly does not suggest that a Black child can make it in a white world without the standard dialect; but what is known about language systems and their differences must be utilized (1970).

Teachers must recognize that students cannot abandon the dialect of the culture in which they live. Standard English must be taught as an alternate dialect rather than as a replacement. Standard English is used when appropriate whenever children must function in the dominant culture. Kenneth Johnson (1971) maintains that SAE should be taught later when children realize a need to learn it and then as an alternate dialect.

**CULTURAL INTERMEDIARY**

Because education is far removed from the street culture, children must be given an understanding of both worlds. What controls language in the ghetto is often local and immediate. Labov and Robins propose a "cultural
intermediary" be brought into the classroom—a young Black male 16 to 25 with high school reading ability, but without a college degree. That person should be given a special license to function in the following ways:

1. to acquaint the teacher with the specific interests of members of the class and to help design reading materials centering on these interests.
2. to provide effective rewards and punishment that will motivate members of street culture for whom normal school sanctions are irrelevant.
3. to lead group discussions on topics of immediate concern to members of the class.
4. to lead boys in sports and other recreational activities on school time.
5. to maintain contact with boys outside of school, on the streets, and help organize extracurricular activities (1969, pp. 321-322).

Labov (1972) also argues that cultural conflict is the major one which prevents mastery of written Standard American English. Erickson proposes,

It may be useful to Black children to learn Standard English as a second language because it is respectable and because it is occasionally functional in special situations. These, I think, are better reasons for teaching standard English than the assumption that one must learn to speak standard English before he can succeed in school (1972, p. 26).

Baratz said, "Standardization is a socio-linguistic fact of life...one variety of a language invariably becomes the standard" (1972, pp. 3-4). Even though using SAE would be "talking like a honky," Black parents want their children to learn standard English. "...the community has a concept of Standard English that is
carried in the notion "talking proper" (Baratz, 1972, pp. 4-5). Baugh (1983) has observed that most Blacks who do speak Standard English are professionals or the children of professionals.

Farr and Daniels (1986) say that Standard English instruction, at least in part, is teaching one to avoid the "stigmatized features" (p. 23) connected to nonstandard dialects. We are also teaching new ways of using the "graphlect"--the written language of the "academic subculture" (p. 24). Characterizing the dialect as "stigmatized and inappropriate for the academic subculture reduces the native tongue to an inferior status.

Sometimes new linguistic skills cause isolation of an individual from his native speaking community.

Many black Americans face a similar linguistic paradox [as Liza Doolittle in Pygmalion]: although they grow up surrounded by peers who value the nonstandard dialect, when they enter a professional society another style of speaking is demanded. Without drawing too many analogies to Cockney, let us say that isolation from the standard dialect and, perhaps, active resistance to acquiring the dialect of the social elites may help explain the survival of black street speech (Baugh, 1983, pp. 2-3).

Therefore, the gap between the dialects continues along with unequal social status and opportunity.

Ash and Myhill (1983) say that "meaningful contact" from sharing, working, living, and socializing experiences is necessary to acquire another's dialect. Blacks are more
likely to move toward standard than whites to nonstandard. But as long as the races are kept essentially separate, the slower will be the acquisition of the standard dialect. The implications are that without meaningful contact, Blacks will continue to dwell in an inferior social level because their non-standard dialect relegates them to an inferior position compared to that of an SAE speaker.

Need to Facilitate Learning

Children of all races have varying abilities and interests in learning, so we are faced with discovering the ways to meet each child's needs. Dr. Jerrie Scott (1980) wrote that it is futile to waste resources to identify how Black children differ from white children when we know that each child has unique traits. There is not one solution to the myriad problems in education. "Unfortunately, we cannot simply remediate all Black children into proficient readers and writers. We can't and we don't need to in order to teach them to read and write. Rather, we need to find ways to facilitate their learning" (p. 144).

Many children seem to know what not-to-do. Farr and Daniels (1986) cited Hatfield (1935), Stron (1960), Braddock (1963), Ellery et al. (1976), and Hillocks (1986) in questioning any positive relationship between grammar
instruction and writing ability, but they did acknowledge the study of grammar as valuable in providing terminology for understanding writing constructions.

According to Labov, "...to be taken seriously by those in power" by using standard English, students should master standard grammar through "meaningful interaction" with written language, not isolated workbook exercises (Farr & Daniels, 1986, p. 36). They go on to say that teachers should encourage reading activities as an essential element in the teaching of writing.

Goodman (1965) notes that teachers are more successful at teaching preferred pronunciation than teaching reading. What is most needed is the important connection between oral and written language that will enable a child to utilize his power over oral language in comprehending written language.

There are significant differences in methods of writing instruction for non-mainstream students. Best available practices need to be adapted to the special needs of students and their school conditions. The danger of instruction is focusing primarily on errors. Concentrating on errors has not worked in teaching mainstream students composition; there is no reason to use that approach for the non-mainstream students (Farr & Daniels, 1986). Many do not know how to correct
nonstandard elements in their writing. They are baffled about what to change. To learn to write standard English, students must be aware of standard rules and non-standard practices. But how the rules should be approached is the question.

**Ethnography**

Gurin and Epps (1975) said that Black students are demanding academic excellence for better jobs, higher achievement, and graduate studies. (Despite signs of greater achievement and higher standards for many African Americans, there are great numbers of Blacks who lack the skills.)

Black students perform well in high context situations in which there is considerable familiarity with the circumstances and the people in it. But because of the low-context setting with a low degree of shared knowledge, the composition classroom is not a place for great success. The student must learn how to deal with this low-context situation, being shown the ways of providing the needed background information (Linn, 1975). Faced with the prospects of drilling with grammar, Linn wrote, "Concentrating on traditional grammar drills seem[sic] to have little effect on student writing unless the drills are integrated with exercises that clarify low-context
situations" (pp. 10-11). Stepping up grammatical usage is not going to improve composition skills. "As Simple tells the narrator, 'Neither is or are reduces expenses. Funerals and formals is both high, so what difference do it make.' Hopefully, teachers can make learning formal English less expensive to the psyche than the funerals of dropping out of school" (Linn, pp. 10-11).

Heath's (1983) admonition is that barriers that separate the classroom from the community must be eliminated to encourage an integration of cultural patterns. Otherwise, the same power group, "the townspeople," will maintain control and constrict any possibilities for other communities to blossom.

The ethnographic methods used in the 70's to cope with the new educational setting of desegregation were most successful in understanding communities and their language use. The 80's, with competency and criterion referenced tests, eliminated the ethnography which provided insight into children and imaginative, innovative strategies for helping individuals develop. Gains from considering individual differences were lost by standardization.

Heath (1983) noted the complexity of preparing children for success in the mainstream orientation for school. She also observed how cultural patterns form different communities with varied and complex uses of oral
and written language; children before the age of four are very limited in their interaction with both adults and children in the communities of Roadville and Tracton [the names given the contrasting communities examined]. Territorial and social boundaries establish communication norms.

By both teachers and students becoming ethnographers, the unique potential and abilities of children from the various cultures (Roadville and Trackton as well as townspeople homes) were realized, particularly to benefit all students with different ways of talking and knowing and manipulating contexts and language. Through these efforts to merge diverse cultures,

...language was the focus. Students could not escape recognizing and having to articulate the differences in language structures, uses of language, and types of interactional cooperation which existed between their familiar domains and the unfamiliar domains of the classroom and other institutions calling for formal language use and special types of speech events, such as interviews (p. 355).

Students then become ethnographers of home and school and, as such, analogues of the systems they exist in each day.

Heath (1983) conducted ethnographic studies of communities in the Piedmont Carolinas and revealed characteristics of the ways with words by different cultures and the impact on language skills in school. Heath discovered that the kind of talk children experience
determines their successful preparation for school. Describing features, labeling, creating narration on items out of context, experiencing stories and situations with imaginative manipulations set townspeople children apart from those from Roadville and Trackton.

Children of Roadville have experienced the order and limitations (lines, time blocks) necessary to adapt to the new setting which comes with school. The children from Tracton, however, have experienced unpredictability and go to school expecting to learn by watching, listening, and trying. For Trackton youngsters "school is a sudden flood of discontinuities in the ways people talk, the values they hold, and the consistency with which the rewards go to some and not others" (1983, p. 348). So the experiences children bring to the new world of school are quite different and dramatically affect how children adapt.

Farr and Daniels (1986) maintain that while elementary school writing instruction has been generally poor, that of inner city elementary schools is probably even weaker since the schools' preparation for reading and writing is also weak. Certainly, the experience of their communities and home environments offers fewer literacy resources than those from the mainstream. Students who come to school using a Black urban dialect must encounter teachers with
positive, nurturing attitudes toward their nonstandard form of English. Teacher attitude tops the list of principles for effective writing instruction: "... in order for any kind of teaching to be effective, teachers must understand as fully as possible the resources their students bring with them to school. Utilizing and building on these resources are the keys to teaching writing to non-mainstream students" (p. 42).

Summary

Examining the literature related to Black English reveals its background and history, along with the characteristics of BEV and the role it has played in our two hundred years in America. Scholars like Walter Brasch (1981) discuss the generations in which oral history was the primary account of Black English, the only written record stemming from the newspaper and magazines. Reliance on oral tradition also accounts for the dearth of information which leaves such gaping holes in BEV history; but then as Arthur Smith (1972) points out, their separation from mainstream existence and the concerted actions by "slavemasters" inhibited chances to adapt to the standard language. Instead, a new dialect emerged which has served to alienate further the African Americans in this country.

Despite these advocates of acceptance of BEV, most people in this country espouse the deficit theory for BEV, as shown by Simpkins and Simpkins (1980), Brasch (1981), Baugh (1983), and Burgess (1992). Earlier negative views stigmatizing BEV are reported in Hannerz (1968), Demerest (1969), and Shaughnessy (1977). Euphemistically, some scholars [Goodman (1965) and Farr and Daniels (1986)] talk of divergent speakers. Whatever the terminology, "the final word" amounts to deficiency—deficiency which prevents the BEV speaker from equal opportunity or ability to function in the American academic mainstream and its society; it is pariah, not parity.

The schools then become the logical place to attack this deficit, although teachers are faced with the barriers erected by home environments and the students' mother tongue. Since the foundations of language acquisition are established early (Wolfram, 1970), obstacles to acquiring SAE are already in place by the time the schools get them.
Some consider approaching BEV speakers in similar ways as treating ESL students, suggested in the works of Politzer (1965) and O'Donnell (1982).

Since the teacher's role is paramount, particular energy must be directed toward teacher preparation. Roger Shuy (1971) feels that educators are not prepared to deal with minority language problems. Williams and Whitehead (1971) admonish teachers not to confuse differences with deficits, but to become sensitive and objective toward language differences. They join the ranks of Drake (1965), Labov (1969), Abrahams (1970), and DeStefano (1973) who recognize the importance of understanding culture and patterns of BEV.

Ethnographic studies like those of Heath (1983) have provided important insights into the factors that influence the development of young learners. Such efforts enhance understanding of an individual and what has influenced him/her and might bring about Smitherman's (1979) cry for cultural pluralism and a social universe that is humane rather than language as a device of oppression. Positive expectations alone can have a profound effect, as researched by Chunn (1989).

By 1992 BEV has become rooted in the African-American culture and a source of security and identity. Smith and Smitherman are two of many who recognize the necessity of
respecting BEV. Goodman (1965) sees use of the language the learner brings to school as a practical solution to the problem of literacy. Consequently, bidialectalism appears to be the answer to the dilemma of success in U.S. society, found in Baratz (1972), Hamers and Blanc (1983), and Farr and Daniels (1986). Bidialectalism certainly is essential for anyone who wants to function in the dominant society and language without excluding an individual because of his/her home environment and mother tongue. Farr and Daniels (1986) have said that students must be aware of standard rules and non-standard practice, but how they should be approached is the question. Nearly twenty years earlier Labov argued that students should master standard grammar, but not by workbook exercises.

O’Donnell (1982) recognizes that there is a need for research to understand the similarities and differences of SAE and a second dialect, and to develop effective materials and methods for students. Just as Heath proposed, both students and teachers should become ethnographers in order to understand and appreciate diverse cultures and language, and then profit from the interaction with both new and familiar domains. The complete picture that such studies give attracted me to use the qualitative methodology to gain insight into these students and their background.
The case studies presented in this paper provide examples of successful bidialectal manipulators of BEV and SAE. Knowing backgrounds, attitudes, and influences of the case studies may help teachers to develop methods and other students to learn code-switching, which is an important step to function on equal ground of American mainstream society and to drop the masks of concealment and protection described in "We Wear the Mask" of Paul Laurence Dunbar.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS

Case Studies

In this study I seek to discover factors which enable the speakers of Black English Vernacular to acquire Standard American English. The primary methodology of this study is qualitative research through the use of four case studies. Smith (1978) used the term "bounded system" for the case study that examines a specific phenomenon, a program or person or process or social group. In my study the group possessed bidialectal powers with BEV and SAE. It is ex post facto research, exploring conditions which might lead to an effect. The advantage of this methodology to the reader results in an understanding of the subjects, extension of experiences of the students, and greater conviction in what is known (Merriam, 1988). Guba and Lincoln (1981) view case study as the best reporting form because it provides description, is life-like and holistic, clarifies meanings, relays tacit knowledge, and considers information to arrive at judgment, what they call the "final and ultimate act of evaluation" (Merriam, 1988, p. 28). Bromley (1986) says that case studies
get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires...). Also, case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely whereas experiments and surveys usually have a narrow focus (Merriam, 1988, p.29).

The data of qualitative research are presented through thorough description of subjects involved, their interactions and behaviors, activities, incidents, direct quotations about thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Such data may also include segments of documents, journals, correspondence, formal writings, and case histories (Patton, 1980), (Merriam, 1988). Descriptive research characterizes things the way they are. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1984).

Nonexperimental or...descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study (Merriam, 1988, p.7).

Ratcliffe (1983) states that both qualitative and quantitative data are interpretations of experience. "In one case the experience is mediated through words; in the other situation, through numbers. ‘Numbers, equations,
and words share similar properties; they are all abstract, symbolic representations of reality, but they are not reality itself" (Merriam, 1988, p. 68).

As Merriam says, interviewing one-to-one allows one to experience from another’s perspective. The participant observer is without equal. As Lincoln and Guba (1981, p. 213) write:

In situations where motives and attitudes, beliefs, and values direct much, if not most of human activity, the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer—the human being who can watch, see, listen... question, prove, and finally analyze and organize his direct experience (Merriam, 1988, p. 103).

Along with sensitive observation and analysis as well as tolerance for ambiguity, the effective case study investigator must possess good communication skills. "A good communicator empathizes with respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently" (Merriam, 1988, p. 30-9).

The Researcher as Participant Observer

Since this researcher has taught English and speech for thirty years in both high school and college (as well as adult education), the approach to the curriculum has always been student-centered, maximizing the techniques necessary to enhance the individual's development. In capacities as mentor, counselor, director, or friend,
establishing rapport has always occurred readily, again apparent with the subjects interviewed for the case studies. The subjects were eager to discuss their backgrounds and experiences. Appearing relaxed and comfortable, they spoke openly and honestly. So the relationship went beyond simply teacher-researcher (1) because the subjects were not necessarily enrolled in my classes [only Will was enrolled in one of my classes], (2) my conversations and exchanges had an informal, friendly quality about them; and (3) they tutored in a communications lab that I supervised.

For nearly a quarter of a century, I had taught English to upper-middle-class, college-bound, suburban white students. Together we read and discussed classic masterpieces of literature (works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Swift, Conrad, Austin,) sharing ideas and insights through both written and oral expression in language from a common ground. Changing jobs to a college setting in an historically Black university altered the character of things in more than the obvious ways. In this new environment much of the vocabulary was foreign ("chillin," "perpin"); pronunciation of familiar words was not recognizable; grammar was non-standard; sentences were fragmented. [For comparison of cultural literacy, see Appendix B.]
My previous personal experience had been almost entirely with a few African Americans who knew how to negotiate the language requirements of the white world. Now I was on different turf. Even if these students might develop facility with Standard American English later, the entering freshmen, initially encountered, exercised their full Black English Vernacular muscle in this new academic arena. No doubt many thought their new instructor had a hearing deficit as I so frequently responded to their oral responses or questions with "Excuse me?" This refrain was the politic phrase uttered whenever I could not decipher what the students were saying. The hope was that asking the students to repeat the comment would somehow make it easier to understand—however, such was not always the case. I surely did not want to make them think their register was inferior or unacceptable. I wanted them to feel at ease using their dialect.

Setting for the Study

This study was conducted at an historically Black public university. The typical student body enrollment is approximately 3000, 95% of whom are African American. There is a scattering of Caucasian students (I had an average of one each year out of over 200 in my classes each of seven years). Most students came from urban areas where they
attended predominantly Black high schools. At least 90% receive some financial assistance. Nearly 50% start in University-College designed for those who have math and/or English deficiencies which preclude performing at college level.

The interview setting is an institutional green-painted 20X30 classroom with five conference tables. Eight individual study carrels line one-third of the perimeter, a chalkboard consumes another third, and the rest is covered with shelves of hundreds of outdated textbooks and programmed units seldom exhumed from their dusty resting place. The drab sterile quality to the setting did nothing to create a warm, comfortable setting--one where the students might feel at ease giving their responses to my questions. I thought it very important for the subjects to feel comfortable when asked about aspects of their childhood, home life, peer group, former teachers, etc.--elements of their personal lives. Since the surroundings were not conducive to relaxation, I was conscious of establishing and maintaining a rapport with the subjects. The lab supervisor's desk rests no more than twelve feet from the discussion tables and certainly within earshot of the students' conversation. The proximity permitted careful listening as well as frequent inclusion into their discussions. About half of the
students live in dormitories while the other half commute from off-campus housing or homes in nearby cities. Consequently, the lab sometimes takes the place of a lounge.

At the time, my "office" was a corner of the small classroom attached to the rear of the communications laboratory—a lab which offers English tutoring for students taking developmental English or for those experiencing difficulties in communication skills in other university courses. While often a distraction, it also revealed the presence of skilled practitioners of Standard American English in the peer tutors who worked in the laboratory. So the lab allowed me to hear the tutors speak their different dialects. Furthermore, there were some skilled writers in my first quarter Freshman English course, the course for those whose placement test scores deemed them prepared for college English. Students who spoke and wrote in SAE were a small minority compared to those whose vocabulary, grammar, and overall dialect sounded a discord.

The not-so-surprising question occurred: what makes a certain few of our students so different in their language usage? Ability and educational background are factors one might anticipate finding; I wanted to discover whether other factors were determinants. The students who
demonstrate their proclivity are not "eggheads" or social misfits. They operate very successfully in this social setting, many occupying important leadership roles or receiving special recognition or honors by their peers, such as club or class officers or election to be king or queen. It becomes apparent that learning what shapes these students is important information to know and to discover whether common elements might be shared, or if each case is unique.

I set out to find a purposeful sampling of such successful bidialectal students in order to conduct an exploration of multi-case studies. The subjects were Black, male and female, who possessed the ability to negotiate the style shift between BEV and SAE. The majority of Blacks in this country grow up in urban ghettos and must overcome countless obstacles, so the individuals of this study should also be products of the ghetto to imitate the environment that most Blacks must deal with (Harris, 1993). Then, by extensive and varied methodology, I seek to determine what are the factors which empower so few to do with SAE what so many Blacks cannot do.

Their academic records [see Appendix A] as well as their performance as tutors in oral and written communication are evidence of their facility with Standard
American English. Observations of tutoring and peer interaction demonstrated their ability to shift linguistic style from Black English Vernacular to Standard American English. Both male and female subjects were included to avoid questions from use of only one gender.

Additionally, (although not a criterion for selection), all four case studies, coincidentally, came from divorce settings and were reared by a single parent in a deprived economic environment. All survived the urban ghetto with its turmoil, deprivation, and danger. All were willing and eager participants in discussing their experiences for this study. Discovering what affected language development of the subjects might lead to new teaching techniques for others to master SAE.

**Data Collection**

From September 1985 through August 1987, I observed both oral and written language of African-American college students. Each year I taught English classes with enrollments of 200-250 students. In addition, I supervised a laboratory where 300-400 students sought assistance each month to remedy weaknesses in oral and/or written communication skills. From personal observation
of hundreds of students, I became aware of the few whose language abilities were vastly different from the problematic non-standard language of most.

Several of those students who were proficient in the use of Standard American English were tutors in the communications laboratory, tutoring five to twenty hours each week through work-study positions or college-cash positions from a Board of Regents grant. Over a two-year period twenty tutors were supervised as a part of my job as director of the laboratory. From those twenty, ten who tutored the greatest number of hours were interviewed and included in the initial data collection. From those ten the number of case studies was pared to four for a number of reasons: graduation, not returning to school, and other time commitments interfered with continued participation of the other six. Four of those six had also attended public or parochial schools which had predominantly white, middle-class student populations which probably had a strong affect on language acquisition and could explain in large part the students’ facility with Standard American English. Since I was most interested in learning the factors which influenced language development of students from the urban African-American background, I chose to eliminate students from areas where SAE was likely to be the dominant dialect.
## Phase 1

### Time | Procedure
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**Preliminary Observations**

**September 1985** | Began teaching at historically Black college. Immediately observed vernacular dialect in both composition and conversation, different from the standard English of my background and professional experience.

**January 1986** | Began supervision of language tutoring lab where 300-400 students visited each month for help with oral/written communication.

**September 1985-June 1993** | Taught 200-250 African-American students in Freshman grammar and composition each year.

## Phase 2

**September 1987** | Began preliminary conversation with various tutors.

**October 1987** | After discussion with many business people, colleagues, students, other professional educators about language usage of African-American students, I decided there was need for study of bidialectalism.

**January 1988** | Focused on 10 tutors to explore backgrounds contributing to language and personal development.

## Phase 3
January 1988  Narrowed case studies to four subjects and began audiotaping of interviews. Written surveys of 128 African American college freshmen and 53 suburban white high school seniors on cultural literacy [see Appendix B.] Surveyed 41 African-American college freshmen on reading [see Appendix C.]

January 1989  Began transcription of audio tapes of four case studies to begin data analysis

Spring 1989  Gathered writing samples

September 1992  Acquired placement test scores and transcripts of courses of the case studies

Various data collecting techniques were employed in this study. The researcher was the primary instrumentation. (1) Four to six hours of individual interviews were recorded on auditory tapes. Responses to questions are arranged side by side in tables to allow comparison of answers. (2) Field notes were collected from observations and conversations involving the subjects in the communications laboratory where they functioned as student workers under the supervision of this researcher. (3) Formal writings were completed by the subjects both in the laboratory and in the dormitory rooms. (4) Placement test scores received from testing office. (5) Transcripts of courses and grades received from university registrar.
The tutoring laboratory permitted the researcher to function as participant-observer as well as an unobtrusive witness to their interaction with peers. The rapport which had developed between the subjects and the researcher over the two years together as supervisor and tutors invited open expression of ideas and feelings. While "openness" by students might have been unlikely in the presence of a teacher, their discussing teachers and administrators with their indiscretions, their using non-standard constructions and vulgarisms, their exploring recent gossip suggested a candor that young people often avoid when an older adult can hear what's going on. Recognizing that I have been an English teacher who constantly is confronted with "I'll hafta watch what I'm saying" and therefore might affect language style, the same participants were asked to keep a journal written in a stream-of-consciousness style, recording their thoughts and words as they flowed, not as they were carefully structured for formal writing. The journal entries included reactions to events, personal problems or feelings, observations about peers—anything at all, just so it employed their natural language. A journal might also provide more free expression of ideas and feelings. However, this activity was eventually dropped since students were more likely to participate in directed activities and less committed to solitary projects like a journal.
One afternoon a fatal shooting occurred outside a classroom building; needless to say, it prompted considerable discussion among students whose linguistic guards were lowered, and vernacular tongues moved in very emotional reactions. Furthermore, campus unrest over dormitory living and dissatisfaction with administrative practices and campus security prompted opportunities for natural expression of thought and emotions, often quite animated and incensed. Again, my working at a nearby desk was a part of the setting and allowed numerous observations without inhibiting students' open involvement in conversation. This arrangement permitted me to take what Labov calls the "soundest approach" by observing a speaker interacting with the peers who affected a speech of everyday life when the observer was not present (1969). It appeared the subjects considered me trustworthy rather than intrusive, and even, at times, invisible.

The subjects were requested to write a formal paper to assess the use of Standard American English. Subjects were then interviewed after completing the writing to ascertain what conscious factors of Standard English entered the communication process (an attempt to get inside the participant's mind). This information verified what academic records and faculty recommendation had
already indicated. The emphasis of this study is to discover what affected the acquisition of SAE by the case studies.

**Interview Questions**

The environment of the historically Black university and its population coming mainly from urban ghettos prompt two primary questions to form the basis of this study:

What factors, if any, enable Black college students to negotiate the style shift between Black English Vernacular and Standard American English?

How may environment, education, and peers affect the development of Black English Vernacular and Standard American English?

Numerous questions were posed in a rather random manner in open-ended interviews. At times responses inspired other inquiries. Establishing a comfortable, conversational atmosphere enhanced student participation, so the following questions were employed in no particular rigid order but in such a way that casual, friendly interaction might occur, while at the same time gathering the necessary data for the basic questions being studied. All four case studies were asked all of the questions. Answers varied in length--some, a yes or no; others,
longer explanations. The interviews were conducted in two
or three sessions. In Chapter 4 the responses are charted
side by side to permit comparisons.

Dialect Awareness (BEV and SAE)

1. What has been the language in your home? neighborhood?
school? church?
2. What is Black English? its characteristics?
3. Is it very different from white English?
4. Which do you prefer? Why?
5. When were you first conscious of the differences in
language?
6. Do you feel deficient in language skills? Why?
7. What do you perceive as the most frequent "errors"
related to BEV~SAE bidialectalism?
8. Are there BEV words or constructions you do not
understand?
9. Do you avoid some BEV constructions?
10. Does BEV make you feel inferior? Is it a handicap?
11. How has BEV affected SAE and vocabulary?
12. Are there elements of BEV which you feel would be
enriching to SAE vocabulary?
13. How did you acquire knowledge of SAE?
14. Where is BEV "required" in your life?
15. Can you achieve your life goals without SAE?
Education Influence

16. Were there any teachers who had special impact on you?
17. What is your attitude toward education? formal schooling? English?
18. What has been the attitude of your teachers toward BEV and SAE?
19. How did you learn English in school?
20. What about grammar and the structure of language? Was grammar studied as a separate discipline?
21. Did teachers spend a lot of time and energy correcting the language usage of students?
22. Did you look at language of school as right or wrong?
23. Did teachers treat BEV as wrong?
24. Why did you come to college?

Home and Other Influences

25. What are your life or career plans?
26. What is the role of language in those plans?
27. How do you feel if someone corrects your usage?
28. Is the church a big influence in your life?
29. What is the language of the church?
30. Did it influence development of the language of your life?
31. Who or what factors outside school influence the development of SAE?
32. How do your friends back home talk?
33. Do you use a different dialect with your friends back home?
34. Do you like to read?
35. What do you like to read?
36. Do you enjoy Black authors?
37. Is their language a factor to understanding or enjoying what you read?

Factors affecting speaking and writing

38. To what extent does speech affect one's ability to write SAE?
39. Is the switch more likely to occur in writing than speech?
40. What unconscious and conscious considerations go into your writing and speaking?
41. Has your speech changed significantly since you first came to this university? Why?
42. Do you like to write?
43. Is writing a pleasant or positive activity for you? Why?
44. Have you had much experience in public or "formal" speaking?
45. What type of writing did you do before coming to college?

**Code Switching**

46. How do you think code switching ability between BEV and SAT develops in the college student?
47. What are the clues to knowing when to switch?
48. Do you think in one mode and write in another?
49. How does audience or purpose affect your choice?
50. Is language choice a conscious consideration?
51. Why do some make the switch and others not?
52. How do you help someone make the switch?
53. Is the switch easier in writing than in speech?
54. What are the biggest obstacles?
55. Do students who speak BEV and SAE consider themselves bidialectal?
56. Do you recognize signs or situations which require a particular language choice?

**Quantitative Measures**

The student whose language is based primarily in the vernacular develops a knowledge deficit which may be almost impossible to overcome. For many of those students, learning comes from what they hear and see, not
what they read. The vernacular may also have different word meanings which put an individual at a disadvantage, e.g. using "no" for "yes" or "bad" for "good."

My personal observations and experiences attest to notable differences in the SAE language skills of the majority of Black students. My colleagues in the English Department (20 teachers, both Black and White,) all complain of the same problems. But I sought further confirmation by surveying literacy--both (1)cultural elements, "what literate Americans know" (according to E. D. Hirsch) and (2) reading ability, interest, and experience.

The beginning factors in this study involved a distinctive small segment of a historically Black university's population who possessed a bidialectalism of BEV and SAE. An earlier study by Gray in 1979 of Black English and Standard English with reference to linguistic problems of students in a college with a Black heritage showed that students whose dominant dialect is Black English are impedes in academic progress by weakness in SAE skills. That study sought to provide English teachers with background information and teaching guidelines for teaching SAE to speakers of BEV. Gray (1979) maintains that students' Black English speech patterns are reflected in their writing and interfere in their SAE written
performance. She also cited an inadequate knowledge of Standard English linguistic rules. "For those who wish to be proficient and competent in [SAE] the means are intelligent application and study" (Gray, 1979, p. 63.

To determine whether these four cases contrasted from the large majority of African Americans, two quantitative measures were employed. One was a reading survey [see Appendix C] to assess the role and attitudes toward reading. A short ten-question written survey was given to 41 Black college freshmen to determine their reading interest, experience, and attitude. A second questionnaire was a the cultural literacy survey [see Appendix B] consisting of 60 items taken from E.D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy (1987) which includes thousands of items which he thinks literate Americans should know when they complete high school. I selected terms which I felt confident would be presented in most general and college preparatory curricula. The questions were passed to seven colleagues as well as the high school teacher for member checking to confirm the list as reasonable. On the survey, students were given credit for any response that had even a remote indication that they recognized the item. Surveyed were 128 African-American college freshmen and 53 suburban white high school seniors. Both surveys reflected some literacy deficiencies in contrast to the background of the
four case studies. The results of those surveys are reported in the Appendix to provide background information, but they are not central to the case studies in particular.

LIMITATIONS OF CASE STUDIES

I would be short-sighted not to recognize possible limitations to case study research. Merriam (1988) acknowledges there is little available to train individuals in observation or interviewing, nor are there guidelines for the analysis of data or the construction of the final report. "The investigator is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort" (p.34). Guba and Lincoln (1981) raise the issue of bias in case studies often supported by people who have a vested interest in the results. Merriam further raises the question of generalizability from case studies.

Nevertheless, it is these so-called limitations which make case studies most appealing to me. Over thirty years of teaching junior high, high school, college, and adult students have provided thousands of interviews and conversations to glean information to write recommendations, to identify problems, to raise self-esteem in students, to understand behavior, to select
candidates for programs or awards, and to measure teaching effectiveness. I have no particular program to verify; instead I am seeking to know what in the students' backgrounds affect their development of SAE skills.

A researcher's personal biases can not help but intrude in some way, but I honestly am not conscious of any particular bias of my own. I know each subject may have said something that triggered some question or comment in subsequent interviews. Since I used a less-structured, rather open-ended format, questions often arose during the interview from some of the responses the subject gave. Ultimately, I was seeking to extract from each subject as much information as possible seeking what Lincoln and Guba(1985, p. 288) call "dependability" or "consistency" where given the data, the conclusions are plausible.

In discussing external validity Merriam (1988) cites Erickson's idea of discovering concrete universals from the particular. "The search is not for abstract universals arrived at by statistical generalizations from a sample to a population, but for concrete universals arrived at by studying a specific case . . ." (1986, p. 130). Eisner (1981) and Wilson (1979) also recognize how the general is derived from the particular.

In this study I tried to gather as much particular information from the case study interviews so that the
reader, whether parent, teacher, or student, might
discover what generalizations could be distilled in a case
study which Merriam calls "particularistic, descriptive,
holistic, and inductive" (1988, p. 31).

**SUMMARY**

The methodology of my study is descriptive case studies
to engage in *ex post facto* research to determine what
factors influence the effect called bidialectalism. The
subjects are African Americans who adroitly shift between
Black English Vernacular and Standard American English.
Their selection was based on my long observations in the
lab where they tutored or in the classroom. The case
studies were pared to four to make the subjects and data
more concentrated and manageable.

Data were collected primarily through hours of one-on-
one open-ended interviews recorded by audiotape. The
questions were designed to discover the students’
backgrounds; educational, home, and other influences;
awareness of dialects; factors affecting writing and
speaking; and code-switching.

The audiotapes were transcribed to examine the
subjects’ responses and to determine any common influences
and/or different elements which had an impact on language acquisition of the case studies. The responses will be coded for easy comparisons.

Some quantitative written surveys were administered to 222 students to measure whether literacy differences exist. Particular literacy deficiencies may explain the extent to which language acquisition occurs.

While I recognize possible limitations to case studies, I also welcome the promise and excitement which descriptive case studies offer. From extensive examination of the particular may come insights to enhance language skills in African-American students.

In Chapter IV, I will describe each of the four students from the case studies. Then transcriptions of the audiotapes will provide the interview questions and individual responses verbatim. Some questions which served to make the subject comfortable or to break a sterile laboratory question-answer routine were not included if they had no bearing on the main questions of the study. Data analysis will follow.
CHAPTER IV

DATA AND ANALYSIS

"They say I talk white."

"He talks so proper."

"My interest in school is my way out."

"They used to say we think we smart, stuff like that."

Each statement proclaims they were different from their peers in the African-American community. First, they were in college. And they had personal aspirations to a professional career. They sensed their difference. They were eager to talk about it. It was their right to passage.

This chapter presents the data of the four case studies. Most of the data were collected from the responses of the students to questions regarding their consideration of factors in their background which led to their acquisition of Standard American English. The recorded interviews were open-ended and the questions randomly presented. Other information came from notes I wrote after casual conversations with the subjects. Some test scores and transcripts were collected and served to verify whether the subjects demonstrated proficiency in
SAE. Writing samples similarly were gathered for evidence of the students' use of SAE in formal writing, but did not address what in their background contributed to SAE skills.

The criteria used for early establishment of a candidate pool included:

1. African-American
2. Faculty recommendation for SAE ability
3. A-B English student
4. Black English Vernacular background
5. African-American peers primarily
6. Tutoring ability in SAE
7. Bidialectalism in SAE and BEV
8. Public school education

Once it was determined that the subjects met the basic criteria and were willing to participate in the study, the interviewing process began.

The questions dealt with five basic areas of information: (1) dialect awareness, (2) education influence, (3) home and other influences, (4) factors affecting speaking and writing, and (5) code switching. Tables 2-6 present each of the areas of questions from the interviews and a summary of each student's response in order to facilitate comparison between categories. After each table is a brief commentary and analysis of the data.
Following the tables are lengthy discussions of each case study with details about the student's background and personal characteristics, and a transcription of the questions and responses from the interviews. These data are presented in order to help the reader discern the uniqueness of each case study as well as lend insights into their language development.

There were specific criteria used to select the four case studies. Additionally, the students, because of the similarities in their background, had other characteristics in common. All four were products of broken homes with a single head of household. All lived in urban ghettos in public housing on public assistance. Their neighborhoods and schools were almost exclusively African-American. All four were attending college on grants and loans.

Table 1 presents strokes of each student's life portrait (family, housing, neighborhood, income, schools). Some areas were described in similar ways, e.g. all four used the word "ghetto" to describe his/her neighborhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENTS</th>
<th>KELVIN</th>
<th>CARLO</th>
<th>WILL</th>
<th>SONDRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent or guardian</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
<td>5 foster homes</td>
<td>single mother</td>
<td>single mother, poor health—hospitalised for as long as 9 months at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status of Parents</td>
<td>parents divorced</td>
<td>parents divorced</td>
<td>parents divorced</td>
<td>parents separated, father in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>modest house or institution</td>
<td>projects</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>low income</td>
<td>low income</td>
<td>mother employed</td>
<td>low income, public assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>mostly Afro-American</td>
<td>mostly African, some Caucasian in the orphanage</td>
<td>all Afro-American, some Hispanic</td>
<td>All Afro-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>regular attendance</td>
<td>part of some foster home lifestyles</td>
<td>youth center—safe haven, food pantry</td>
<td>Baptist—most important religious beliefs—strength through troubled times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College finances</td>
<td>grants, loans, work study</td>
<td>grants, loans, work study</td>
<td>athletic scholarship, grants, loans</td>
<td>grants, loans, work study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>1 sister</td>
<td>3 brothers, but usually separated in foster homes</td>
<td>2 brothers</td>
<td>9 brothers and sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterisation of &quot;neighborhood&quot;</td>
<td>ghetto</td>
<td>ghetto</td>
<td>ghetto</td>
<td>ghetto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>private academy public</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 2 are summary statements which reflect each student's perception of dialect (BEV). They were asked about the dialect of their home and neighborhood, about their understanding of Black English as well as SAE, about their dialect preference and attitudes, and about their development of language skills.
### Table 2

**Dialect Awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>NELVIN</th>
<th>CARLO</th>
<th>WILL</th>
<th>SONORA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What has been the language of your home? neighborhood? school?</td>
<td>REV is used “around friends, family, or just taking it easy.”</td>
<td>A mixture since he grew up in six different “families,” including foster homes and an orphanage.</td>
<td>REV was the language of the neighborhood, but SAE was required in the home or in the mother’s presence.</td>
<td>REV was the dialect of the home, neighborhood, and peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is Black English?</td>
<td>Different language from what majority in their country speak; just something he speaks. “They call it non-standard.” Can talk without worrying whether REV or nonstandard. “People still understand me.”</td>
<td>Language of the ghetto. People who had “horrible grammar.”</td>
<td>Language of the urban ghetto, gangly.</td>
<td>The language of most African-Americans at home. “Ain’t” identified as major part of REV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is REV very different from white English?</td>
<td>Enough that friends back home say he “talks white” when home on vacation.</td>
<td>REV “sounds so backward or down home.”</td>
<td>SAE is not the language of peers but one for writing, school, home.</td>
<td>Very different, doesn’t like label “Black English.” Seen as prevalent issue in college. Disturbed that dialect used as measure of student’s ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which do you prefer? Why? At home gradually reverts to REV.</td>
<td>SAE preferred; REV sounds “ignorant.”</td>
<td>REV is choice when invited to talk in interview as if talking to a friend, but could readily translate into SAE when required.</td>
<td>Decision to become English Education major makes SAE paramount. Considered speech and writing two most important elements used to evaluate people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When were you first conscious of the differences in language?</td>
<td>Grammar school. Living to New York City at 12. &quot;It was just horrible. It [REV] was ghetto.&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Do you feel deficient in language skills? Why?</td>
<td>Some things he must work on—who, whom, is, are. Feels superior to most; others said, &quot;You talk so proper.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What do you perceive as the most frequent &quot;errors&quot; related to REV—SAX bidialectalism?</td>
<td>Subject-verb agreement &quot;is/are&quot; &quot;ain't.&quot; Horrible grammar by REV speakers. Use of &quot;De.&quot; Subject-verb agreement.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are there REV words or constructions you do not understand?</td>
<td>Couldn't think of any. No. Knowledgeable and comfortable about REV. Felt she had heard it all from schools attended in Detroit.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you avoid some REV constructions?</td>
<td>Nothing came to mind, except example &quot;spoken,&quot; which he found inexcusable. He tries to avoid REV totally because it sounds ignorant. In writing. Generally strives to use SAX, although angry outburst caused regression to REV.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Does REV make you feel inferior? Is it a handicap?</td>
<td>Piers REV simply as different. REV would be if he used it; he considers it &quot;ignorant.&quot; REV important with friends, but recognizes when SAX should be used. People unfairly judge ability or intelligence by dialect used.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How has REV affected SAX and vocabulary?</td>
<td>Conscious of &quot;ain't,&quot; occupying a large portion of speech. No response. REV has affected conversation grammar and vocabulary. E.G. &quot;dissed,&quot; but quick to recognize need to translate or provide synonym. Conscious of &quot;ain't.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Are there elements of REV which you feel would be enriching to SAX vocabulary?</td>
<td>Nothing in particular, except he viewed use of &quot;ain't&quot; as characteristic of REV, and he thought it expressed ideas like no other word. None, other than dialect in a creative piece. &quot;Wah,&quot; they're two different languages. None she thought of.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In school 'standard' and &quot;nonstandard&quot; talked about. Staff of children's home was mostly white as well as other children during formative years, 6-9.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Where is ERY &quot;required in your life?&quot;</td>
<td>With friends at home, sometimes with peers at college. Particularly interested in history of language and words from African heritage. &quot;In the hood&quot;—the neighborhood and conversation with peers both at home and in the dorms. Back home, but not as much as in the past.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determined to master SAE so language didn't stand in the way of success. Wants to be a writer and SAE is absolutely essential for that. No. Wants to enter advertising. Recognizes absolute need for SAE. No. SAE both in speech and writing are requisites.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2

Dialect Awareness

All four subjects knew BEV as the dialect of their environment, although Carlo had experienced SAE in the orphanage. They also perceived BEV as nonstandard, something different from the mainstream SAE or "White" English. They all recognized that BEV was the language used with their peers, although Carlo resented the "ghetto" quality associated with BEV.

All four subjects became aware of the dialect differences in school, recognizing "standard" and "nonstandard" existed. By high school they were convinced that they should understand the distinctions between the dialects and master Standard American English. While they were reasonably confident about grammar skills, they were conscious of their deficiencies and worked at correcting them.

It was interesting that of the errors noted with BEV, the use of "ain't" was viewed as a major error associated with BEV. Of course, use of the contraction "ain't" has long been considered substandard usage in many social levels and is not unique to BEV at all. Its prevalence in American language has caused a degree of acceptance recently as "recognized" in the latest edition of Webster's [Listening does not acceptance make.]
Other than Carlo's condemnation of BEV as "ignorant," three of the case studies viewed BEV as another means of expression appropriate in a particular context. However, there was no suggestion that BEV vocabulary might enrich SAE.

While the four subjects still saw some use for BEV with peers or in their home environment, they knew they must have SAE to accomplish their goals. They acknowledged SAE as an essential for academic success as well as in professional careers in medicine, writing, advertising, psychology, and teaching.

**Education Influence**

Table 3 presents their remembrances of school and those people who influenced their lives. It also explores their attitudes toward school. Examined more specifically is the nature of their language instruction, grammar and drills, composition development and writing activities. Finally, was the question of what motivated them to attend college.
### TABLE 3

**Education Influences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>MELVIN</th>
<th>CARLO</th>
<th>WILL</th>
<th>SONDRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Were there any teachers who had special impact on you?</td>
<td>Lots of teachers.</td>
<td>A fifth grade teacher &quot;who took me under her wing.&quot;</td>
<td>Basketball coach.</td>
<td>Caucasian high school counselor &quot;pushed&quot; her when discouraged and steered her to college. College professor who recognized her move to English education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What is your attitude toward education: formal schooling? English?</td>
<td>Education considered paramount, especially from grandmother's encouragement.</td>
<td>Loves to read for learning. Conforming to formal education not so important. Often reads texts after course is over. Interrupts even a test to respond to creative urge.</td>
<td>Education is paramount. Had to get a job or attend college after his graduation. Accepted mother's insistence on good education. Good teachers—what made high school &quot;fun.&quot;</td>
<td>For Black students &quot;education is not a luxury; it is a necessity.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. What has been the attitude of your teachers toward BEY and SAE?</td>
<td>SAE was right and BEV was wrong, at least in school.</td>
<td>SAE grammar drills were necessary.</td>
<td>Must have SAE to succeed.</td>
<td>SAE is a must to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. What about grammar and the structure of language? Was grammar studied as a separate discipline?</td>
<td>Grammar instruction viewed as specific discipline with lots of practice exercises.</td>
<td>New environments exposed him to new words and expressions like &quot;manipulate&quot; and &quot;Do you mind if I do this?&quot; Fascinated by new words. Lots of worksheets.</td>
<td>&quot;In public school all grammar.&quot; Grammar books and exercises for drill.</td>
<td>Much time spent with grammar lessons and drills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response 1</td>
<td>Response 2</td>
<td>Response 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Did teachers spend a lot of time and energy correcting the language usage of students?</td>
<td>Grandmother speaks SAE. She helped to educate him.</td>
<td>Teachers did not have to spend much time because he was so eager to master SAE.</td>
<td>Part of the gifted program. Teachers were very encouraging.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes. It represented encouragement to improve her skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Did you look at language of school as right or wrong?</td>
<td>Right.</td>
<td>SAE was necessary; BEV was ignorant.</td>
<td>School language was required for future education and career. SAE was right according to mother; other was wrong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers insisted SAE was required, the right choice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Did you look at language of school as right or wrong?</td>
<td>Standard = right, non-standard= wrong. At first treated as wrong, then recognized as different.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>BEV = wrong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No, but same did.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Why did you come to college?</td>
<td>To pursue a medical career and fulfill dreams of grandmother.</td>
<td>Wanted to escape life he had known. Flat feet eliminated the military. Decided to ask counselor about college. Had never known personally any peer who went to college.</td>
<td>Encouraged by coach, mother, and other teacher particularly because he was considered gifted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family was not supportive, but counselor “filled the void where there was no one” and pushed her toward college. Heard college dean of students speak.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3

Education Influence

Education has been a major influence for these students. All four remembered teachers from primary grades through college who had made an impact. Often it was a classroom instructor who encouraged or cajoled them or a coach who pushed for excellence or a counselor who guided toward goals. Education was perceived to be paramount, and teachers made the difference. This kind of attention takes time and is in short supply in most urban schools faced with overcrowding and understaffing (Kozol 1991). Such individual treatment is particularly noteworthy in this study.

The students' development of SAE came from drill and rigorous grammar instruction as a separate discipline. Almost daily assignments in workbooks, practice exercises, (selecting the right choice, the correct usage)—they were taught that standard was right and that nonstandard was wrong. Teachers did more than correct students' mistakes; they encouraged their improvement and helped them appreciate the value of SAE. While there was that right/wrong assignation, there was much emphasis on the necessity of SAE to become "the best that they could be."
After all, that's why they were in college—a place students with their background might not be expected to be.

In Table 4 are summarized responses to inquiries about their home and other influences—career plans, how language fits into those plans, the influence of the church (long a major influence in the Black culture), peer impact, and reading.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Kelvin</th>
<th>Carlo</th>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Sonora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. What are your life or career plans?</td>
<td>Medical school.</td>
<td>Most interested in literature and psychology. Wants to be a writer.</td>
<td>Studied engineering and drawing in high school to be an architect, then changed to advertising to &quot;paint and draw regular stuff people like to see.&quot;</td>
<td>English teacher. Mayor of Detroit, or at least superintendent of schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. What is the role of language in those plans?</td>
<td>Important. Even in high school jobs, recognized need to use SAE.</td>
<td>Language is most important.</td>
<td>SAE is necessary to succeed in world of advertising, but wants to retain REV to go back and live in the city.</td>
<td>Most important to be credible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. How do you feel if someone corrects your usage?</td>
<td>In school setting, it was acceptable because he was determined to master SAE. &quot;Whatever, I'm going to get it.&quot;</td>
<td>Sometimes air of arrogance. Certainly resents the African-American student correcting him. Considers himself intelligent. Accepts when others say &quot;he talks so proper.&quot;</td>
<td>Acceptance, because his mother constantly corrected him to develop language skills.</td>
<td>Depends on who does it. If academic setting, it's expected. Hope by now not much need for correction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Is the church a big influence in your life?</td>
<td>It was important when he was a child.</td>
<td>Probably not.</td>
<td>Attended nursery school in church. Worked in church food pantry to help the hungry—source of good feeling: helping others, &quot;pretty cool.&quot;</td>
<td>Regularly attended Baptist church. Lived &quot;by the will of God and Jesus Christ.&quot;</td>
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**TABLE 4**

Home and Other Influences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. What is the language of the church?</td>
<td>Generally SAE, although the language used by young people mostly BEV among peers.</td>
<td>&quot;We all speak non-standard to each other.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Did it influence development of the language of your life?</td>
<td>Used SAE when talking with adults at church, heard from the pulpit.</td>
<td>Passages from Bible.</td>
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<td>It was a life-style example more than a language influence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Who or what factors outside school influenced the development of SAE?</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Being placed in numerous environments and having a keen interest in details.</td>
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<td>Mother's teaching and correction, even in overhearing telephone conversations.</td>
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<td>Church and mother's urging for her to study hard and &quot;be the best she could be.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>32. How do your friends back home talk?</td>
<td>BEV, not &quot;white.&quot;</td>
<td>Tends to be a leaner, unless with someone he considers intelligent, creative, or educated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BEV only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Do you use a different dialect with your friends back home?</td>
<td>BEV</td>
<td>Uses SAE unless he is seeking to &quot;manipulate&quot; a person.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely a different dialect with friends--BEV.</td>
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<td>34. Do you like to read?</td>
<td>Likes to read.</td>
<td>Avid reader, particularly Black writers.</td>
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<td>Love of reading. More books than anything else in the apartment.</td>
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<td>Always expected to have a book to read.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relatives' homes filled with books of interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. What do you like to read?</td>
<td>Likes entertaining things like news, books on people's lives, rock magazines, People, Billboard.</td>
<td>Prefers reading to classroom instruction. &quot;I'm more inclined to go somewhere and find a book that interests me.&quot; Like Camus' <em>The Stranger.</em></td>
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<td>Books that reflect &quot;on entity of myself.&quot; The Diary of Anne Frank was most memorable.</td>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>36. Do you enjoy Black authors?</td>
<td>Yes. especially mentioned Hansberry's <em>A Raisin in the Sun</em> and <em>The Color Purple</em>.</td>
<td>Malcolm X role model.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Black authors have been particularly important. The <em>Black Experience</em> books by Richard Wright.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Black Boy</em>, <em>I Heard the Caged Bird Sing</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Is their language a factor to understanding or enjoying what you</td>
<td>The content was more important that language consciousness: characters were African-Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>read?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Since he aspired to be a writer, he was fascinated by the success of other Blacks and a feeling</td>
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<td>that he should be familiar with their products.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enjoys a variety of authors, periodicals, novels for content. Most written in SAE.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enjoys all types, regardless of language.</td>
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</table>
TABLE 4
Home and Other Influences

As shown above, students' career choices reinforce their perception of the need for SAE. All recognized it as most important and did not even object to being corrected if it were necessary to reach their goals.

Another major influence in the African-American community is the church. Again, Carlos was less affected by the church because of his growing up in various foster homes and the orphanage. But the other three had been affected by the Protestant church from early in their childhood. Church school as well as Sunday and midweek services are conducted essentially in SAE, along with Bible readings and study.

While teachers had been a nurturing influence for all four case studies, equally important were the teaching, goading, even nagging of a mother or grandmother to use "correct English." These reminders were necessary to counteract the prevalence of BEV around them.

The importance of reading was emphasized by all four case studies. Their reading interests varied from news magazines like Time to classical novels to popular works by Black writers. Most of what Will read was written in SAE. It was content, not language, that was of greatest interest. Reading was a part of home activities, as well
as school assignments. Will said there were more books than anything in their apartment in the projects. This view reflects the belief that reading is key to academic and personal growth and development (Moll 1991). As Langer (1986) notes, reading and writing are the processes not only for communicating but also the basis for personal thought which brings new knowledge and understanding. The importance of reading certainly has been a major influence in the development of the four case studies.

As in the tables that have preceded, Table 5 presents summary responses to questions extrapolated from the informal context I tried to establish in the interviews. This table looks specifically at factors which the students perceived as affecting their speaking and writing, including their thoughts on possible unconscious elements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>MELVIN</th>
<th>CARLO</th>
<th>WILL</th>
<th>SONDRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38. To what extent does speech affect one's ability to write SAE?</td>
<td>Easier to write SAE than to speak it.</td>
<td>Since he sought to be a professional writer, he thought speaking SAE vital to writing it.</td>
<td>Writing is different and requires translation from BEV.</td>
<td>Considerable influence but strives to speak and write SAE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Is the switch more likely to occur in writing than speech?</td>
<td>Writing is usually associated with academic activities which require SAE.</td>
<td>Writing becomes more thinking about the right way to express an idea.</td>
<td>Yes, but it depends on the audience.</td>
<td>SAE is the language of composition and formal speech (evident in oration she wrote and delivered).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. What unconscious and conscious considerations go into your writing and speaking?</td>
<td>Audience means a conscious choice. Casual conversation is natural and probably includes much automatic, unconscious usage</td>
<td>Consciously seeks to avoid the “ignorance” of BEV.</td>
<td>Conscious of what is expected by mother, school, career, but doesn’t worry about usage in casual conversation.</td>
<td>Again SAE used consciously to prepare her to meet life goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Has your speech changed significantly since you first came to this university? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, for when he returns to his neighborhood, friends accuse him of sounding “white.”</td>
<td>No, but the chances of being ridiculed for his “proper” speech are gone.</td>
<td>In the academic circle, not socially.</td>
<td>More SAE since college made her aware of the prevalence of language in educated world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Do you like to write?</td>
<td>Yeah. He thinks he is “pretty good.”</td>
<td>Loves to write and wants to pursue writing as a career.</td>
<td>Likes to write. Outlet for imagination.</td>
<td>Yes. Wants to write best-selling novel some day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Is writing a pleasant or positive activity for you? Why?</td>
<td>“It's O.K.” It did not seem an onerous task.</td>
<td>He thrives on writing.</td>
<td>Enjoys writing and the use of vocabulary.</td>
<td>Positive activity because it aids her efforts to escape the depression of her home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>44. Have you had much experience in public or &quot;formal&quot; speaking?</td>
<td>Melvin performed in a traveling dramatic presentation. Responded formally in question-answer panels afterward. Not formal speech, but his gift of intelligence and ability to &quot;bullshit&quot; make him confident about speech. &quot;Nah.&quot; Rather shy about speaking before group, but savor casual one-on-one conversations. Yes. Won campus oratorical contest twice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45. What type of writing did you do before coming to college?</td>
<td>School papers, some poetry. Mostly creative writing, particularly some lyrics and poetry. Wrote paragraphs or stories which teacher's &quot;very interesting&quot; served as positive support. Papers. High school newspaper staff; some poetry.</td>
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TABLE 5
Factors Affecting Speaking and Writing

The case studies were conscious of SAE and BEV in both speaking and writing. SAE in speech was probably more difficult because talking is automatic without careful structuring of the best way to state ideas. All of us have nonstandard, ungrammatical elements in casual conversation. But writing typically requires more careful attention to the way we say things. It is also associated with academic activities which expect SAE.

Melvin, Will, and Sondra acknowledge the importance of audience in deciding which dialect is important. Carlo does also, but again because he views BEV as ignorant, he consciously seeks to avoid situations where BEV might be appropriate. Regardless, the speech of academia continues to leave its marks so that trips home bring the accusation of sounding "white."

Especially noteworthy is the very positive attitude that all four have toward writing. They view writing as something positive, often an outlet or means of escaping the world around them. It is a creative activity for all; each delves into poetry writing as well. Herein may lie a very significant insight into these students feelings
about writing. Having been encouraged to approach writing creatively, even poetically, seems to have resulted in positive attitudes about writing.

**Code-switching**

Table 6 provides their perceptions of how one develops the ability to shift between BEV and SAE, knowing when to shift, and the affect of audience on the choice. They also considered whether they thought in one mode and spoke in another, why some made the switch and others not, and what obstacles interfered with using a particular register.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code-Switching</strong></td>
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**QUESTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>HELVIN</strong></th>
<th><strong>CHRIS</strong></th>
<th><strong>WILL</strong></th>
<th><strong>SONDRA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46. How do you think code-switching ability develops in college students?</td>
<td>More switching is required between the HEV of the dorm and the SAE response to questions and formal speeches.</td>
<td>Environment and experiences.</td>
<td>More writing demands SAE, but conversation still requires HEV.</td>
<td>Develops more because of greater awareness of language differences and necessity to reach goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. What are the clues to knowing when to switch?</td>
<td>Setting and audience.</td>
<td>Seeks to use SAE unless to parody or create special effect of African-Americans.</td>
<td>Situation or audience.</td>
<td>Audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Do you think in one mode and write in another?</td>
<td>Probably; more HEV.</td>
<td>Strives to think in SAE.</td>
<td>Tends to think in HEV and write in SAE. Evident in taped stream-of-consciousness of composition.</td>
<td>Usually SAE now although at times uses HEV to make peer understand or feel comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. How does audience or purpose affect your choice?</td>
<td>Spoke SAE when at work or with adults at church, or in school.</td>
<td>Seeks to have few if any dealings with HEV. &quot;He hates poverty and stupidity.&quot;</td>
<td>These are the primary considerations.</td>
<td>Usually choose SAE and people who know her major accept that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Is language choice a conscious consideration?</td>
<td>Usually.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes, although HEV in the neighborhood is automatic.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. Why do some make the switch and others not?</td>
<td>Education.</td>
<td>Ignorance.</td>
<td>They haven’t learned SAE or been required to use it.</td>
<td>You can’t switch if you don’t know SAE and you must know it to get ahead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. How do you help someone make the switch?</td>
<td>Tell them when they make a mistake.</td>
<td>Teach them the SAE.</td>
<td>Study.</td>
<td>It must be taught in schools—a major reason to be in English education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response 1</td>
<td>Response 2</td>
<td>Response 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>53. Is the switch easier in writing than in speech?</td>
<td>Easier in writing</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Easier in writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>54. What are the biggest obstacles?</td>
<td>Speech habits</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Your friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>55. Do students who speak BEV and SAE consider themselves bidialectal?</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Yes. [Bad studied history of language.]</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
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<td>56. Do you recognize signs or situations which require a particular language choice?</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Does. Seeks only SAE.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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TABLE 6
Code Switching

Code switching is more pronounced in the college setting where SAE expectations are much greater in the academic realm in sharp contrast to the social realm of an historically Black university where demands of BEV prevail. Bidialectalism is necessary if a student truly seeks to negotiate the curves which exist in both SAE and BEV. The question occurs whether an individual tends to think in one dialect more than another. On this question the group is split. Will and Melvin are more concerned about maintaining their ties to the "hood" and say they think more in BEV. However, Carlo and Sondra have worked hard to make SAE their primary dialect. Carlo because he is determined to eradicate any connection with the ignorance he associates with BEV, Sondra because she wants to be a high school English teacher free of the stigma of nonstandard usage.

What are the obstacles which interfere with acquiring the facility of bidialectalism? Unanimously, the subjects blame ignorance, the failure to master SAE in school. They also see old speech habits and peers who employ mostly BEV as obstructions to mastering the transition between the dialects. The dialect of the "hood" lends a special identity to people whose poverty may provide
little reason for self-esteem. The SAE of a society which appears to be their adversary may be intentionally avoided and also viewed as a sign of surrendering to the other world. Both the long-time necessity of developing their own language and the more recent presence of cultural pride and identity provide another barrier to acceptance of SAE.
FOUR CASE STUDIES

What follows are excerpts from two to three hours of audiotaped interviews with the four subjects of the study. The responses are verbatim accounts to reflect the natural dialect of each subject who had been invited to speak the way he or she would converse in a casual dialogue with a friend. Two subjects generally spoke SAE: Sondra was an English education major and Carlo was trying to avoid BEV. Meanwhile Will and Melvin were comfortable using BEV once they knew it was acceptable in the interview situation. Each session lasted no longer than one hour, conducted during the winter and spring quarters in 1988.

Additional information came from notes written after casual conversation in the laboratory or class building where it was common to talk with the case studies almost every day. This almost daily contact helped establish a rapport that made the students willing participants in the study. The interview is the primary source of data because I was seeking to know what they perceived were the factors which influenced their acquisition of SAE. The information will also allow the reader to appreciate each student's accomplishments despite the condition which ordinarily present obstacles to success.
Melvin

Background

Melvin was a pre-med major who displayed outstanding academic promise. It was overall performance of A-B work and proficiency in composition that prompted an English instructor to recommend him as a tutor in the Communications Lab where students sought help for development of writing skills.

Melvin had a "full-ride," receiving aid for the year, including work-study which permitted a student to work up to twenty hours per week to earn money for expenses. He also had joined a small drama ensemble that traveled throughout the state, performing primarily at churches and schools with mostly Black populations. This, coupled with other speech activities, made him an ambassador for the university, a superior representative to project the best possible image for the school.

Melvin was a child of divorced parents, raised by his grandmother in Philadelphia. One most vivid memory of Melvin was a revelation he had soon after arriving at college where he met students who actually lived with their parents. Amazing as it way seem, he thought all children were traditionally reared by their grandmother.
He had been, and so had his friends in the city. Now, here were students who talked about home with Mom and Dad. Strange indeed!

While Melvin had a sound mastery of Standard American English in his writing, his casual conversation was difficult to decipher at times, as evidenced in the transcription of his responses to interview questions. Again, like many conversationalists, his speech was profusely punctuated with "you know." While certainly a habit, it may also suggest his desire to determine if the Caucasian speaker of Standard American English really comprehend what he was saying.

It also reflects what seems a quality of a particular conversation in which gestures, eye movements, body language communicate some ideas and implications that are never verbalized. Melvin’s existence had been almost totally in the Black world of the urban ghetto, so talking to the researcher, "Whitey," was a curiosity at best and a treading into new territory at least.

One day in the spring of his last quarter in school, Melvin came to talk with me. His thinking was muddled; his speech, distracted; his emotional state, depressed. Obviously, he was in an altered state of mind. Tears welled up in his eyes, then he looked away as he told me he had a drug problem. His attendance at work had been sporadic in recent weeks and he seemed withdrawn. His
problem was not marijuana; it was cocaine. It had started with a few free samples and emerged with a major cash outlay.

How such a large sum of money could be available is the result of some incomprehensible machinations with grants and loans. Many students on financial aid receive a sizable refund check near the end of the quarter. Melvin had received $1400 which he spent on cocaine in less than two weeks. That money also was owed his grandmother who had sacrificed for Melvin to attend college. His remorse as well as his dependency were both certain. What he wanted from me was to call to his grandmother to explain his plight, assure her that he was seeking help, and help him find the public health agencies to aid him in his addiction.

Before me sat a despondent student who embodied his grandmother's dreams and who now seemed destined for disaster. My last contact with Melvin came by telephone in 1990 following several terms of his working at home and exploring the military as an alternative. He was inquiring about a tutoring position when he would return to the university later that week. Two years passed and Melvin still had not returned. He had left the threatening ghetto, but he had not escaped.
Interview Questions

What does Black English Vernacular mean?

It means that is a different language than what majority of other people in this country speak. It's just something that he speaks. They call it non-standard; they say it shouldn't be used. When around friends, family, or just taking it easy, I can just talk without worrying about Black English Vernacular or non-standard English. People still understand me.

What do you think are the particular characteristics you are conscious of in Black English?

I use a lot of slang words, such as: "What's up brother?" I can't think of any since I'm thinking standard or structure.

What kind of structure?

Try not to use words like ain't, contractions, slang words, or anything like that. [He could not think of any slang words right away, because he was trying to use standard English.] "He was buzzin'" means someone is high; or "blow the back out of that test" means to pass that test,"I got an A+." Do you still want me to speak any way I want to?
When you say "anything like that," does that mean "typical"?

Yes. I thought it was just me, but it that. I'm going there; I'm going over there." You know. [Each phrase was punctuated with nervous laughter.] Then I say [laugh] instead of library, I say liberry [laugh] You know. It's like you make words shorter; you don't emphasize certain consonants and vowels, you know. [laugh] You know like brary; you don't say the b-r-a; you say berry, the b-e-r. you know. Something like that.

When do you become conscious that your natural language is different from standard language?

I think I was conscious in grammar school, not real low grammar school, something like the 6th grade or 5th grade, one of those big kids. And you know how they give you papers and they give you the English book to do and you know how you have to determine between is and are or ain't and another equal word or something. He are going to the store. You know. You hear some people say he are going to the store and they were going to the store or something like that, you know, this is how basically we spoke, you know, we use to speak like that, you know, like that, you know. Then she was saying this is the right way and this is the wrong way. She was telling us the difference between the non-standard and the regular:
English and from their, you know. It was like there was almost a split, there is a split, you know. There is for someone who does not, you know, for the majority of the people in the United States, who, you know, don't speak non-standard English or Black English or Black whatever. It was never really a problem.

Did you do drills or some exercises from grade school to learn standard English?

Yes, they gave us like papers so we could circle the right one, you know, then you could tell them why, because of the verb or the subject he, not he are but, you know, he is, according to the story, you know. Then you tell them why, something like that. Then you start to know, you know. You start to know. [Much of the rest of this response was confusing.]

Did they always talk about Black English as being non-standard or in any terms to make you feel inferior?

I never knew, OK? They would always say non-standard English, but I didn't know Black English was non-standard English. That's the honest-to-God truth. I didn't [laugh]. They would always say this is non-standard English and this is standard English. There was no, you know. It didn't or they didn't say this is Black English and this is White English over here. You have to learn the White
English. It was just that this English over here was wrong.[laugh] It was wrong. Like that! Then as I got older, you know, like a year it was. That’s the way Black people spoke, you know; that’s how they spoke. Then I started reading things in the paper and pamphlets, saying that the English was not necessarily wrong because that’s what our race of people speak. This how, you know, came over from some of the rules that we use, you know. And how we use them come from our way of speaking and our way of thinking or whatever, something like that. Culture different or something like that. Then it was not really wrong; it just was not accepted by the majority. [laugh]

Was there anything particular that was hard for you to learn or any changes that were hard for you to make?

Yes, I hate that I still have problems with that today. But when I read over like something like if it is here and when I read over it, then I can understand it, then it’s like who, whom [laugh] well, you know, something like that, you know, like the first time. [Not thinking quickly enough] still gives me a little problem. When I was on the job, I use to always speak standard English, you know, at this job. I was a filer, who filed notes, letters, folders and things like that. I always spoke the standard English, you know, but then I had to
use whom one day and who [laugh]. I basically know the
difference a little bit. But I’m still going over that
now. Whatever. I’m going to get it.

Does the setting affect the language you use?

Yes, because when I’m home and sometimes I mix up, I
speak standard English in a non-standard environment, you
know.

Does that cause problems?

You know, they say I talk white[laugh] you know.
Something like that. So, you know, when I’m home it
gradually change, you know, like what’s up man? You know,
what’s up? Nothin’. I’m just here and around, you know.
I’m not doin’ nothin’ really. So what’s up? Nothin’ man;
I just came home from school. I am really doin’ nothin’.
So what are you up to? What you gettin’ into? I ain’t
gettin’ into nothin’. I’m just here man; I’m gettin’
ready to go up there and see what’s up. Then you start to
know, you know, like that, you start to know.

You used “ain’t” a number of times. Is that something
you’re conscious of?

You know ain’t is ain’t [laugh] it’s ain’t. Like you
say, ain’t is ain’t. I mean, you know, it might sound
funny to you and whatever, but, you know, I ain’t doin’
nothin’, I’m just here, you know. So what’s up wit you, right? Ain’t nothin’ up with me man. I’m gettin’ ready to go up there and see what’s up, you know.

So everybody understands what you’re saying?

Yes, they’re like what’s up with him, man? Man he’s buzzin’. I don’t know what’s up with him, you know; he might be high or somethin’, you know. He better get off that trip or somethin’ like that.

Do you belong to a church?

I used to.

When you go to church, do you speak a different language? Yes, kind of. Did I speak a different language? Well, not really. I don’t even pay attention to that, but I know that the people of the pulpit that had their degree and went to school and everything, they spoke in a kind of standard English. The people like the kids who would come to church and everything, we all spoke non-standard [laugh] you know, to each other. And we--even when we spoke to some adults-- we would try to be polite and everything [laugh] but ain’t would still come on out or something like that.
What about here at school?

Here, when I’m speaking to teachers or something like that, I try to speak a standard way, but like a friend or somebody like that [laugh] you know, I speak in a non-standard way, you know. You can just switch back and forth, you know, because one of my friends, I mean not one of my friends, but just one of my associates, but he said something--what did he say--he said I was "tooken." He is a music major and he said something about he’d tooken the test already, you know. I corrected him on that because that sounded so far out; that sounded gone; nobody should make that mistake ever. I mean I don’t care what kind of English you speak, you know, that don’t make no sense to use tooken, instead of taken.

Then again, he may have been trying to say it incorrectly on purpose for effect.

Yea, he didn’t have it in his head yet or whatever, you know. My grandmother helps to educate and she speaks standard English; she always corrects us.
When you were corrected, were you told you shouldn’t talk that way? If you want to get ahead, you can’t say it that way?

Yes, she would be like don’t say it like that. Why don’t you say it a different way? Why don’t you say it like that, you know, because sometimes I would be like where you at? [laugh] behind the preposition? What you mean behind the preposition, she would say. I’m behind that preposition at the end of the sentence, like that. Where are you? not where you at, something like that.

Did your parents speak standard English?

My mother speaks a little standard English, if you can understand what I’m saying. It’s not really standard English, I don’t think. Yeah, it’s a stab at it[laugh] like I ain’t going up to the street, something like that, you know. It not standard English. It’s not. My grandfather couldn’t speak standard English and their kids didn’t.

When you went to school in Philadelphia, did you mainly stay in one area?
I lived in one area the majority of my life, but when I was younger, I went to a private school. It was a little nursing private school, you know; it went up to whatever grade.

How long were you there?

It seem like a long time.

Like first, second, third grade?

Something like that. I didn’t have to go, except with my sister; she went to the school I went to, except I had graduated from that level. See what I’m sayin’? And when we had move there was a split. Well, we left and went to live with my grandmother, and she had to go to that Get-Set because we didn’t live in that area any more and the riding was back and forth.

Get-set?

Yes, there was a school called Get-Set and that where she went. They were taking us back and forth to the private school, and they were like you know. I can not do that anymore, you know. So I went to the public school by my grandmother’s house.

What kind of school was it? church? or integrated?

Yes, it was integrated.
Do you think that had something to do with the English you
developed?

I think it had a lot to do with developing my person-
ality for the simple fact when I went to school with (umh)
when I went to school around my grandmother way, it was
nothing but black kids, you know, and when I went to the
other school, it was black and white kids. It was OK; it
had its mixed standard English because most of their
parents were educated people. I used to meet some of
their parents, you know, when you were small, you know how
you use to play with the kid, this is my mother and they
use to come over there. This is this and so on; well, they spoke in a standard English way.

Do you think because you were in a standard English
environment, it helped you acquire Standard English?

Yes, because you pick up on that kind of stuff, you
know. Even now, if you were around people who spoke a
non-standard English, you know, you always around your
little gang or drinking buddies, and you come in there
speaking who and whom am I speaking to, you know, or
something like that. You know you have to change up a
little bit for the simple fact that you don't want to. You
still want to be your own individual, but you don't want
to be outright, you know, just different because you just want to be. You have to change your speech a little bit. Everybody understands you and then you can understand, because it’s not like English, because you have some white people who speak non-standard English, but majority of the Black people speak the Black English Vernacular [laugh] speak in this way and majority of white people speak in that way, which isn’t that bad when you separate the two.

When you went to the public school did you have to speak “another language”? Were your teachers white?

No [to both questions]

What about junior high? Did it bring about much peer pressure?

Yes. I spoke non-standard English all the time.

So your language fell back into the Black English Vernacular exclusively?

I tried to be a little different, but, you know, by the time I got to high school, you know, you basically know what’s going on, and I had to change.
Was that a problem?

No. Certain words I couldn’t say. I wouldn’t say some of the letters like "liberry" of "revelent" you know. I couldn’t say irrelevant. I would say "irrevelent." I wouldn’t say the word right. Then I got to the point where I would put it on my papers. I knew the answers to the English.

Did you learn the rules and drills?

Yes.

You use in speech now a lot of Black English Vernacular here. Do you think the fact that you attend a Black college has had any effect upon your speech?

Yes. I mean it’s not negative. I’m not saying that it is negative, because it’s not. I chose to go to a Black college, and the only thing, a lot of people up here come from areas where there is a whole lot of Black English, even if their parents are educated, they spoke the Black English Vernacular, and they probably deal with people who speak BEV and a whole lot of them speak Black English or somewhere along those lines. And you get to meet them and speak like them, you know. It’s all common, but if I was at a white university and most of those people speak, you know, the standard form of English, and it would take its toll on me, because I would want to speak the way they
speak. because they wouldn’t understand some of the things I say like “what’s up?” you know or something like that. [laugh] What’s going up [laugh] I mean.

Do you read a lot?

Yes, I like to read.

What kinds of things?

I like to read entertainment things like news, books on people’s lives, and rock magazines. You know those rock magazines like “People,” “Billboard” things like that.

What do you think you read most consistently, on a regular basis?

I think entertainment.

Do you ever read novels? Is there any author in particular that had any effect on you?

When I was younger, I used to read those entertainment novels, you know, things like that, but I have not read any adult books[laugh], but I just have not read any adult books. But I have read a lot of other books, but I don’t have a favorite one right now. But when I was younger, like in junior high school....
Are you conscious of using the words "you know"?

[laugh] You know, everybody say that, you know.[laugh]

Why do you think you use that expression? Many people use that; it's not Blacks only; many white people use it.

I don't know, because my father used to say "dig it" all the time. Dig it! [laugh] He would be like he would stand here and talk to you, be like this is going, like this and this is going, like that "you dig it?" You be like why you keep saying "you dig it?" [laugh]

It's really an attempt to find out if people are listening or understand what you are saying. Also it's a way to avoid silence. Some people can not stand silence.

Yes. That's the way I feel. I hate when the conversation just stop.

Conclusions

Use of BEV

When asked about the Black English Vernacular, Melvin offered a rather simplistic conception of what it entailed. Granted he was not a linguist, but somehow the non-standard "ain't" was the benchmark or at least the
most glaring example he could think of. Use of Black English Vernacular was natural for him. "I can talk without worrying. . . . People still understand me."

But the people who "still understand" him must also be users of the Vernacular. Often BEV speakers carry on conversations simultaneously, use incomplete sentences, omit words, employ slang, gesticulate rapidly, yell at the same time to the level of a roar, and come away somehow (imperceivable to me) sensing, maybe intuitively, some message. "Somethin' like that" was the catch-all for all examples without mentioning anything specific.

Use of SAE

The knowledge Melvin had of Standard English was apparent in his writing and speaking in an academic setting. The roots of such knowledge came in elementary school where students were drilled via exercises requiring the right choice. Although his examples were weak, he knew what subject-verb agreement required. Later on he cited an example of a student who used the word "tooken." While his own speech is peppered with non-standard constructions, he pounced on this student he had corrected for using something "so far out." Ironically, his own words were almost indignant: "that sounded gone; nobody
should make that mistake ever. I mean I don't care what kind of English you speak...that don't make no sense to use tooken instead of taken." His own agreement errors and double negative were glossed over; but then, I had invited him to speak any way that felt natural to him. His natural language was BEV, yet he was conscious of what he considered blatant errors.

**Code switching**

In responding to the question of his consciousness of style shifts, he said, "It was never really a problem." The school setting with its pages of practice exercises and a dogmatic teacher telling him what was right and what was wrong necessitated mastery of a standard dialect. However, Melvin never got the impression that Black English was inferior. While teachers talked about standard and non-standard language, he did not equate the "wrong" English with Black English. He realized that is the way Black People spoke: "I started reading things in the paper and pamphlets saying that the English was not necessarily wrong because that's what our race of people speak...Then it was not really wrong; it just was not accepted by the majority." While such an attitude has caused a dangerous void for many, recognition of BEV does allow a degree of dignity and worth. Regardless, Melvin
continued to be conscious of language and grammar in an on-going effort to master Standard American English. In speaking of the use of who and whom, he said, "I basically know the difference a little bit, but I'm still going over that now, Whatever. I'm going to get it." But he also said "Ain't is ain't" as if it were an immutable element of language.

Setting and Language

Setting at times complicates style shifts.
"...when I'm home and sometimes I mix up, I speak Standard English in a non-standard environment...they say I talk white...So, you know, when I'm home, it gradually change..." Just the suggestion of shifting to a home dialect evolves into the common trait of BEV of dropping the final -s on third person singular, present tense ("it...change").

The church is one of the most powerful influences on Black culture. When asked if church affected his language choice, Melvin acknowledged what he referred to as a politeness by youth in addressing adults in standard English "but 'ain't' still come on out." Undeniably, though, the language of the pulpit was "a kind of standard English." The King James Bible offered another model for language development.
Reading

Reading had long been, and continued to be, a cogent activity in his life. He read primarily periodicals and biographies, but not many "adult books," a term he equated with best sellers and popular fiction which he separated from academic readings and literary works he associated with school curricula. He could read at an early age and continued to read as a pleasure reader and one who wanted to be aware of what was happening in his circles of interest. The specific books he mentioned included books by Judy Blume and titles such as Raisin in the Sun and The Color Purple.

Important Influence

Maybe the most significant person in Melvin's development was his grandmother who spoke SAE and was always working to educate her grandchildren. She was a presence reminding them of the "right" way to say things. When the children were taken to her home to live, they could no longer attend Get-Set, a private school designed to aid children to "get ready; get set; go."

Since the public school he now had to attend provided a peer group of BEV speakers, the grandmother became an essential model for SAE communication. Melvin commented
that "...a majority of the Black people speak Black English Vernacular, speak in this way and majority of White people speak in that way, which isn't that bad when you separate the two." But if we are to co-exist and hope to articulate by common language, such separation will be counter to individual advancement and mutual understanding.
Carlo

Background

Carlo, a sophomore psychology major who writes poetry, composes songs, and draws cartoons, provides a case study of a "creative" individual. "Individual" is certainly no misnomer, for Carlo marches to not only a different drummer, but a whole brass band. He has gone through a series of outrageous periods, each marked by a startling costume, shocking hair style, or bizarre behavior. Once, he assumed a quasi-preppie look with always matching socks, shirt, or sweater. His explanation of such an image was to prevent personal boredom and to keep others off-guard. He does not want to be predictable. Even his creative moments are unpredictable; but when they do surface, he stops whatever he is doing to respond to them.

Carlo's youthful years were marked by turmoil. His life was a series of foster homes after his mother decided she did not want to raise him. The oldest of three boys, Carlo was "farmed out" at birth, but his younger brothers were raised by his mother. He lived in six different family settings in Cleveland and just recently went to live with his father who sired at least four more children with other women.

I first noticed Carlo when I "inherited" him as a
work-study student in the Communications Lab, when I became Director of the lab. The workers are supposed to possess strong language abilities to enable them to help students who come to the lab with writing problems. While not all the lab workers are particularly strong in language skills, Carlo immediately showed me his glibness, especially his stinging tongue.

But if Carlo never uttered a word, one could never avoid the "statements" he makes. This lanky, gangling artisan is the Afro-American counterpart to Ichabod Crane. His slender frame borders on emaciated although his demeanor bears a healthy puckishness. Long spindly fingers and ski-length feet provide the longitude and limit the latitude he allows others he meets. In fact, Carlo, by and large, is very intolerant of others. On the other hand, his efforts to isolate himself from others constitute a blatant attempt to win attention and acceptance of sorts. One day, he said, "I hate poverty and stupidity." That same day I found on my bulletin board a sheet of paper headed "Epitome" with four names listed. Frequent visitors to the lab, these named students were ones Carlo had labeled as the epitome of stupidity. Carlo is rather precocious, but somehow feels
a need to project an image of intelligence: he must divorce himself from any association with people of lower intelligence.

While Carlo is not wanting for intelligence, he is lacking in formal training. For example, he writes both lyrics and music for songs, but he has no formal training in music or performance. Whatever he plays or sings is "by ear." Nevertheless, he was negotiating with a record producer about some his songs as a result of tapes he had sent the man. He creates and performs, but he cannot write it out musically.

Carlo does have a rather sound background in grammar and composition. His language, though, finds greatest ease in writing poetry. One spring his work took second prize for poetry at the university; the prize was presented at the weekly convocation. Since none of the recipients would be permitted to speak, Carlo decided to wear the most outlandish outfit he could put together, as well as to style his hair in shocking, spiked disarray, gleaming from a bottle of mousse. He was making a statement without words. When asked if he would do the same the next year if a winner, he said not. "They're expecting a statement this year; I'm not going to give them one."

Carlo thrives on unpredictability. He dares to be
different until that's what is expected of him; then he falls into more conventional behavior and attire. Last year he worked at being bizarre—strange clothes, unexpected outbursts, wild hair; the next fall he assumed the collegiate preppie look. Winter quarter brought always matching socks and shirt combinations, emphasizing bold yellows, reds, and oranges. As spring quarter approached, he was exploring possibilities for a new image.

Carlo delights in catching people off-guard. His honesty borders on rudeness, sometimes driving his victim to the point of tears. And no one is exempt. An English professor was observed wearing the same pair of brown "floods" daily for three weeks. ("Floods" are pants that are too short by fashion's standards; these, far above the ankles.) Carlo walked up to the professor and asked, "Dr., what kind of a statement are you making? I know you're trying to say something." Of course, the teacher did not know what Carlo was talking about, but any student within ear shot knew Carlo was ridiculing the prof.

Yet with his boldness, rudeness, effrontery—-with his bizarre actions, ideas, and words—Carlo draws many people to him, not unlike Samuel Johnson, who displayed every quality and reason to drive people away, yet remained the most compelling personality of his day. Such people are
curiosities. A large part of Carlo’s appeal is his rich sense of humor and keen observation of detail. He notices what most overlook or sees things from such a unique perspective. Nuances or perspectives are important elements of his creativity.

Additional insights into Carlo can be gained by examining the following written remembrances I received from him:

Nov. ’83 I was the victim of a brutal robbery. This experience made me the self-centered, cold-hearted egotistical fellow I am today. (From this experience I developed the every-man-for-himself philosophy.)

May ’85 I was baby sitting four small children when their home became engulfed in flames. (From this experience I learned the danger in ignorance, inexperience, and lack of knowledge.) I also developed this philosophy "You do all that you can for others, and with just a mere shift in the pendulum, you could end up hated, resented, and ridiculed."

June ’81 Meeting of the Pointer Sisters (established hope for the future as well as a new family).
Fall '73 I was literally snatched out of the home of my loving foster mother and put in a home for "homeless children." (From his experience came the philosophy "Take control of your life, make sure you're in a position to, because if you're not, someone else may make decisions for you which you are unable to change.")

All through junior high school, I was often made a mockery of, humiliated, ridiculed, and taunted. (From these experiences I learned how to also ridicule, how to also become critical of others with no regard for the feelings of others.)

I also never got over the fact that I was a foster child for fifteen years of my life, although I'm closer to my family now (even living with my father.) But I can't honestly say I really know what love is.

I also find it extremely difficult to love others or become close intimately (especially sexual relationship.) I've so far found it impossible to give of myself in that way. I've lived in six different family settings.
I spent hours of fascination with Carlo for this case study. What follows is a transcript of some of the questions and responses received:

*What inspires you to write?*

You might be doin’ somethin’ and an idea hits you and you just gotta run somewhere and start writing down what you feel ’cause you’re afraid you’ll lose it. I can remember once in high school—once in the middle of a test, it was a math test—I stopped in the middle of the test because I started becoming inspired by something—needless to say I didn’t finish the test. I’ve been doing other things in class and become inspired or listened to the teacher’s lecture and I’ve become inspired and I have to express whatever I’m feeling.

*Do you prefer a particular environment when you’re creating?*

No not really. I think the best environment is one when I’m confused or a little unhappy. It seems I turn out the best things then or when I’m extremely happy, but when I’m somewhere in the middle, it’s not all that spectacular. It seems when I’m unhappy, I come out with some really
positive things, sometimes really negative. If I feel something really strong—something really moves me—I have to be really moved.

When you create, do you go at it for long periods of time?

It's really pretty short. I don't usually spend a long time on a particular project. I don't really take a long time. I usually get dry after while. I think some of my best things are things I turn back to. A lot of my work comes back to me. A lot of what I wrote—4,5,6 lines—I've come back to, on, a year later and wrote another six lines and thought 'Oh, this is good.' Because it's almost as if I've started something and it's a growing process. "Theatrics Failed" is a poem I started and finished two years later. I feel like it grew with me.

Do you have any preschool memories?

I was unruly, a discipline problem.

There was a fifth grade teacher who took me under her wing. She was really nice.

What made you decide to go to college?

I'm not quite sure. I considered the military and went through everything but the physical. I have flat feet. So I asked myself what was the other alternative
'cause I knew I didn’t want to live in the same environment I have lived in. So I went to a counselor and said I wanted to go to college. I had no idea what college, so she suggested this university. I had never heard of it and I had never talked to anyone who had gone to college. So I had no idea what to expect.

_Did you have any kind of background for college?_  
Not really. I'm more inclined to go somewhere and find a book that interests me. Even now I'm inclined to read a textbook after a course. I take courses rather leisurely. I often ask myself what would happen if I gave myself 100%.

_What about the language you use?_  
From doing research and doing papers, I think I have some understanding why some Blacks may speak more standard English than others. I don't know though. Actually the real reasons for differences in language are minimal. Reasons to do with environment and other experiences. I can't say why I talk differently from my brothers, but I do believe it has a lot to do with environment and our exposure to different things.

_Understanding of Language_  
Carlo had a good understanding of pidgin and Creole
development in the Black culture, which he had learned in college studies. His considerable interest in language development has been a positive influence on his own language. His was interest in words and their development from Black culture and what they have contributed to standard English.

Didn’t you live in several foster homes?

Well, two. I was telling a friend I had never lived in one place more than three years. And now I’m in college and won’t live any place more than three months and I’m tired of it.

What was the racial mix of your high school?

70-30, 70% Black. Most of the students there were inner city--the projects, ghettos, you know. At least 75% were from families that were single parents. None of my friends’ families have cars or were living with their natural fathers or fathers at all.

Now were you in a foster family in high school?

Yes I was. Now my permanent address is with my natural father.
You went to a public high school. What about grade school?

Did you go to a private school?

I lived in a children’s home, but I still went to public school. They locked us in. All the doors were chained so we couldn’t get out, except the front entrance where they had a really huge security guard.

Do you ever have any white foster parents?

No, I never did, although except at the children’s home. Most of the staff was white and that was my first introduction to standard English. I heard things I had never heard. My first foster parents were from the South. And they were Black and they were elderly in their seventies and they used Black terms. In the home I heard words like “manipulate”; Carlo quit manipulating people. "I doubt it" was another expression I heard a lot there that I hadn’t heard before. People use expressions like "Do you mind if I do this or that?" rather directly stating what you’re going to do.

Do you remember any books that have been important in your life?

A lot of the books by Blacks. The Black Experience. I really like Richard Wright, Black Boy. Maya Angelou I Heard the Caged Bird Sing. I liked Camus.
Did you identify with *The Stranger*?

Not totally, but I thought of the scenes from the past and what happened didn’t have much response from him. He was kinda just there, existing without putting much of an effort into much of decisions in life.

*When were you first aware of differences in languages, say the vernacular and standard American English?*

I’ve lived here. I lived in New York, Boston, the children’s home, with my foster families. I was about twelve. I lived with my natural mother in New York City. It was just horrible. It was ghetto. It was the first time I realized I talked differently than most of the students. Because there was always a lot of emphasis made on the way I talked. "He talks so proper," which in itself sounds so backward or down home, "You talk so proper." Actually I got a lot of ribbing for it, but, now, being here I think it’s pretty close to standard.

*Why was your language different from most others?*

I don’t know. Maybe it was because I was in the children’s home. I was there only three years, but it was during the formative years, six and a half to nine.
Language is developed between two and fourteen and I'm not sure. Language develops from a mixture of different things. The fact that I never lived in one place for more than three years gave me the opportunity to learn different styles. My foster parents were from the South. I lived with the people in the children's home. I lived with the people in the inner city, people that had horrible grammar.

Do you think you will have the opportunity to pursue your aspirations?

I should hope so....That's the only thing that was important to me. And whatever reason, I still believe I have a chance in this white world, in this society. . . . I want to be a writer. My foster mother, being 70, she never read. She never asked how I did in school or what I did. She could read on a third or fourth grade level. No one at home said learn all you can. I was not in an atmosphere conducive to learning. I don't know where I learned to "bullshit" my way through.

I think it's an imborn talent.

I think it takes intelligence to bullshit. At one point I used to be ashamed to bullshit, but now I realize
it takes intelligence to bullshit. An idiot can’t bullshit. I think idiots who bullshit always get caught at it, eventually. If I hadn’t learned to bullshit, I don’t think I’d a-made it here... It hasn’t caught up with me yet.

**What about your brother that was down here?**

He’s back home. His girl just had his baby. He doesn’t have a job; he’s on welfare. My other brother’s in jail.

**Do you like you?**

Yeah, most of the time. . . . I know my ego needs constant feeding. "Little Shop of Horrors." "Feed me!"

**Are most things written in stages rather than one sitting?**

Most of my works are written in one sitting. That’s usually when I’m writing music. Music is very simple, and it usually comes in one sitting. Whereas, sometimes with poetry, I might have to go back once or twice while it’s still fresh to see if I still like it.

**Do you think you’re creative?**

I think I am. I don’t know anyone else my age who’s any more creative. When I look at other people around me,
I think I'd have to get in an atmosphere of other creative people to see if I'm creative. Also, I think if I didn't think I was creative, I wouldn't be. Yes, I am! If I say I am, I am! I haven't seen many people around me turn out much better my age. So I'm not really worried.

*How would you define a creative person?*

Not to be able to do anything very well, but to do a lot of things good. I think a creative person can do a lot of things good, but not one thing well. You can't just be a musical genius, and just be good at that. I'm sure you could play well, but maybe not read well. To be really creative, you have to be able to do more than just one aspect. [Carlo is using "well" as the superlative and "good" to mean just "fair."]

There is a spontaneity about what Carlo writes, whether a response to a question, a set of lyrics to a song, or some of his poetry. Included here are some representative texts of two of his poems. There is really nothing about the poetry to suggest the work of one whose background is Black English Vernacular. Even the subject matter, one about a Madame who "took care of everything," particularly the girls she employed, and the loss of a precious moment of childhood innocence, displays the expression of a writer at home with Standard English.
Sample Poems

Saving My Licorice Gum

Since Tracey left
I haven’t picked the purple-colored flowers
At the end of old Jackson Road
Or bought penny candy for Clinton’s corner store.
I haven’t eaten graham crackers with make-believe tea
Or played hopscotch until I was almost out of breath
It rained the day Tracey went away
The last day of April.
I stomped in puddles until ordered inside.
Tracey’s father went to a big city
to work for a company that draws pictures and writes words for books.
I can remember me and Tracey reading some of her father’s company’s books
Under a damp blanket that smelled like grandma’s closet
Until the batteries in his father’s flashlight faded
There hasn’t been much to do since Tracey left
I’m waiting for when she comes back:
I have an aggie marble, a stick of licorice gum and a shiny blue ribbon
In our secret hiding place under the porch

Fannie Takes Care of Everything

In a house on a little street in a big town
Lived a lady by the name of Fannie.
She wore gaudy jewelry and a black sequined gown.
Fannie had several little ladies
She kept them very busy.
She kept them in order
With the utmost of sincerity.
The townspeople said that there would have to be a change
Or at least that’s what the women said.
This got her girls a little worried
But Fannie told them not to worry,
not to worry about a thing
For in a town of backsliders
Fannie takes the board room by storm
Like everyone knew she would.
Good thing they’re mostly men
Or Fannie might have been misunderstood. 
If Fannie could change not girls, but men
I know she would.
Fannie told her girls not to worry, not to worry about
a thing.
For in this land of milk and honey,
Fannie takes care of everything.

Composing

When Carlo discussed the writing process and,
particularly, the molding of a character, he approached
the individual as if talking about a real person.
Whomever he creates becomes flesh and blood, someone a
person would believe actually existed. Undoubtedly, Carlo
becomes totally absorbed in his poetry and experiences
vicariously what is presented in the writings. It is
amazing what this world of creative expression has opened
for Carlo, for his life has provided every reason to
follow a destructive path. Somehow he has been consumed
by a creative germ within or exposed to its fever and has
become a creativity carrier to others.

In Carlo's poetry there is the feeling of longing for
something missing in his life. Even though he disclaims
much that is autobiographical. I suspect there is an
unconscious reaching for things he wishes he could have
had--a friend to share special moments with, like reading
by flashlight under the covers, or a strong mother he
could count on--one who would "take care of everything" as
Fannie did. Even Carlo's behavior suggests a need for attention that may have been denied him as he was tossed about in his childhood.

During one of the many interviews I had with Carlo, another lab worker overheard the conversation as Carlo was discussing in detail his heroine Fannie. Suddenly, a quiet tutor, Melvin, interjected, "Carlo, you are really creative!" Then he too began discussing Fannie as if she were real. Because he got caught up in the existence of such a character, Melvin decided to start writing something. In the midst of this dialogue, Tonya, a third tutor, overheard the discussion which piqued her interest. She started leafing through her notebook until she found a poem she had written and proceeded to read it and win the approval of her listeners.

My case study had been interrupted by a fascinating interlude which revealed something important about the creative spirit in people. It is there waiting to be awakened if only encouraged or made to feel welcome. The creative urge is the saving grace in Carlo's life and must be cultivated. In an environment conducive to and accepting being creative, especially the school, student creativity will emerge blossom and spread to epidemic proportions.
Language—an Escape

Examination of Carlo's responses to the questions reveals the impact of Standard American English on his speech. He decided early in his life that he was not going to be shackled by any language that might make him look stupid or inferior. While his environment would foster Black English Vernacular, his aspirations would not tolerate it, at least not as the primary code of expression. Even the samples of his poetry suggest little, if any, qualities associated with Black English.

It is likely that the years in the children's home provided language influence by authoritative figures who used standard English. What is equally likely is that Carlo's acute attention to detail allowed him to imitate the usage of speakers he sought to emulate. Still another factor is his interest in good literature, including the works of Richard Wright and Albert Camus.

His world was certainly one to escape, particularly considering its rejection of him starting with his mother who didn't want to be bothered and the series of homes that shuffled him about. College had become an option he had not considered; after all, he had never had family or friends who had gone to college. His above average intelligence and creative personality provided fertile
ground, plus his idiosyncrasies and bizarre behavior required a more accepting atmosphere than his earlier years ever permitted. Furthermore, he chose a manner of speech that distinctly alienated him from his peers and their vernacular usage.

Once on the college scene, Carlo exploited the freedom he longed for. He flourished in courses that traced the history and impact of Black English in our culture. Here he was seeking an element of prestige associated with his Black heritage. He chose literature and psychology to study. He was stimulated by what piqued his interest or his creative urges, often not reading textbooks until after the courses when he had heard all the instructor had to offer and was motivated to learn more. In fact, no matter the academic conditions, he had a genuine hunger for the knowledge he could gain from reading.

Carlo also craved attention which singled him out. It did not matter if he gained that attention through his music, his poetry, his rude, outlandish behavior, or his bizarre, motley dress. Once he had captured that attention, he wanted to convince his audience that he was in control of Standard American English and anything but stupid, the condition he most abhorred. While there were
positive influences on what Carlo became, there were even
more compelling factors from the ghetto of what he did not
want to be.

Creative Contagion

Creativity is catching
When germs are let to spread
In air that’s free to breathe—
A state that should be fed.
Its fever can be healthy,
Not measured by degrees;
In heat of inspiration
A fettered soul it frees.
The symptoms oft lie dormant
As feelings are denied
Until the itch develops
From rash that won’t subside.
An unction can be offered
To soothe the sting within.
It can’t go long unnoticed
So sensitive the kin.
In fav’rable conditions
The urge will long survive.
Creators are pandemic
With cells, oh, so alive!

Ronald Price
Will

Background

First impressions are often misleading, and certainly this was the case with Will. Will came from the urban ghetto of New York City, one of three boys raised by a single working mother. Bright, curious, artistic, he was a product of a public school gifted program and an outstanding basketball player. Admittedly influenced by Malcolm X and his own mother, he grew up in a very strict home environment which was an island in the precarious, almost deadly neighborhood. Curfews, violence, and crime kept the three brothers inside where television and lots of books filled the apartment’s free time schedule. His presence at first offered little suggestion of academic promise in the college classroom, but his first paper revealed the work of a word artist as well as the graphic artist that he was studying to be. Will was a fascinating interview who loved talking about his background and was always eager to return for subsequent sessions. He even wrote a composition for me while talking in a stream of consciousness motif in the tape recorder.

How would you describe your early childhood?

STRICT. Yeah, ’cause of everything that was
going on around, ya know. in our neighborhood, so, and my
mom and pop is divorced so it's just my mom and so, she's
real strict on us to go one way.

Where did you grow up?

Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York--a tough area.

Are you an only child?

No, I have two brothers that are younger than I am, but we all in the same age range--21, 22, 23. We're real
close. We all had to go through the same thing together. If one got in trouble, we all got in trouble, so we can
all learn from the other person getting in trouble.

Did you go to public schools?

Yeah. I went to a public school. I went to pre-
kindergarten. Kindergarten, nah I didn't go to pre-
kindergarten. I went to nursery school 'cause my mom
worked. Then kindergarten. All through public school I
had good grades. I was in I.G.C.

What's that stand for?

I always got the impression that teachers always told
us it was for intelligent and gifted children, but I
thought it meant something else about, uh, something and
gifted children, not intelligent. I think something
else. . . .

*Were the nursery schools public or associated with a
curch?*

I think it was associated with a church because it
was a church next door, We used to go there sometimes.

*Were the schools you attended integrated?*

Un uh. In my neighborhood it was basically all
black.

*Were there any white teachers?*

Yea, a lot of white teachers. But most of my
teachers I had throughout public schools were black.
About two or three were white from grade kindergarten
through sixth, say about two or three white.

*What do you think made your education different if you were
identified as an I.G.C.?*

Oh yeah, you could tell because we had a much heavier
workload, you know. The other kids used to always, they
didn’t bother us. They used to just say we think we smart
and stuff like that, ya know? We think we can do jes as
good as you can and stuff, so, we used to have things like intramurals almost like basketball and baseball and stuff. We used to win and all that so we used to win in everything we did so that kinda made it worse too, but basically everybody was cool 'cause everybody came from the same surrounding neighborhood; practically grew up outside school.

So you went to school with the same people you lived with; in effect, you didn't go to another part of the city?

Not until Junior High School 'cause we moved to Brownsville, Brooklyn, a little rougher than Stuyvesant.

Why did you move?

Uh, I think it's 'cause of Bed. Stuy... 'cause, uh, our family had basically moved away, somewhere back down south to Georgia, and some spread over, so we wanted a little better place to live and around that time that's when housing projects were really kinda good to go into especially ours. We went to a nice one. It was always clean and neat and stuff there. The crime rate was low; it was high in the neighborhood, crime rate was high, but in that project we had like ten patrols and the 33rd precinct right on the corner. So it was basically
alright. We had a little shopping there. Now it's kinda like you got a scale. It went down. A lot! From the time we moved in til now it went down alot!!

Was the project integrated?

At first, when we first moved there, when we first moved there, it was about 1976, and it was a couple of white people still there. By 1978 there wasn't because the Brownstown history is basically Jewish, but then when Blacks and Puerto Ricans moved in, they moved out. Then it just started coming more and more just like that. That neighborhood was more housing projects than any other neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Just like Harlem? Harlem was Jewish.

Yeah, at one time.

I think Cleveland was that way, and Cincinnati, too. It follows a pattern. Do you think you got a good education in the public schools?

In public schools I think I did. But in junior high school I was a S.P. class, that mean that was another smart class over the rest of the classes. So, the teachers really tried hard to give us a good education, give us enough work. But because the environment was
hard, because like the hoodlum kids and stuff would come 
busting in the class and disrupt the class and rob 
everybody or beat up the teacher and stuff like that, all 
kinds of wild stuff.

*Did they have security guards or anything?*

Yeah, they had security guards. It was like 
everybody was just that wild. A person that used to go to 
our school in the seventh grade that people believe that 
he did, but he really did. Mike Tyson went to—and him and 
his little gang or crew, they used to terrorize the school 
and had the other kids from the Village projects 
terrorize—and then it was like it wasn’t like gangs, but 
it was like a whole gang of kids of each project stick 
together and cause a lot of damage.

*Were they junior high age or older kids that came in?*

It was basically, see they, everybody was in junior 
high school, so they were kinda older ’cause they were so 
wild they never passed any classes. So some of them were a 
little older and still were there. Some was basically the 
same age as the wild, following the wild guys.

*Were you ever in a gang?*
Naw, the closest thing I came to a gang was when I was in Bed. Stuy, me and a couple of my friends, we had our little club and we used to, you know, try to get all the gang kids to chill, you know, like calm down so we used to challenge them in basketball games and stuff like that. One time we had a little scuffle with them, but they didn’t really turn out to be much, cause usually they’ll fight and they’ll go to really hurt somebody. When we fought, it was like, almost like we was playing ‘cause they was like, happy to assume that they were happy to have the good kids with them at the time. Then after a while that diminished and they went back to doing their thing, and we went back to doing our thing. ‘cause it was, we was basically in church ‘cause the man on our block was a reverend and he used to always, you know, ask everybody’s parents if it was alright we’d go to church with him and do certain things. He gave us a little basically when his building was free. So we made it into a big clubhouse with offices and stuff like that. We uh one day had the free lunch program in New York City for the people that can’t really set that much food; we was the ones handing it out, you know, dishing out the food. Cleaned up. Sometimes we not supposed to do it, but sometimes we’ll close the door and give out extra or sometimes we’ll cook it up for ‘em ‘cause we had grills
and 'frigerators and stuff. Then they would give us a little tip or something, but we just say nah. So we was pretty cool.

*When you were in high school, did you feel threatened for your own safety?*

Throughout first and sixth grade, not until the fifth grade, the first time, well really. I got ripped off a lot of times 'cause they'll come up there and say "yo man gimme a quarter"; then they'll be three or four of 'em and you'll have to fight or give up your money. So instead of fighting, I'll just give it up and just go ahead, you know, but I'll still have my other change that they didn't know I have with me, so I got over. But one day this dude, when I got a little older, bit bigger, he tried to rip me off and I told him he wasn't "gettin" it. "We just gonna have to fight." So he just snatched my money and ran. you know. Since I had a lot of friends that was wild, too, I tole them and they went to the junior high school, looking for the dude, but we couldn't find him. So it was like I was kinda in both, 'cause I had a lot of guys that was pushing me that was wild 'cause they liked me, and plus they knew my father. And then I had a lot of good friends 'cause we all knew what we was gonna do, you know. We was hoping to do alright growing up. In junior high
that’s when I really felt threatened ’cause it was so wild. We couldn’t eat lunch in the caf because they would pick people, like you wait in line, then come just pick people randomly, like they just went by you, take you in this dark bathroom and about twelve people just beat you up. Luckily I didn’t get that treatment, but my friend got it one day. So after that we always come to my house to eat. My mom said it’ll be alright if we came home to my house to eat. We’ll eat sandwiches and go back to school.

You were allowed to leave school for lunch?

Yeah, so we would leave and then come back, but then we would have to leave sometimes we find the safest way to leave, like one day we’ll leave through the back because the front there’s so much goin’ on. Then one day you might have to leave from the front because the back there’s so much goin’ on. So it was like that. And make it so funny, the precinct was right here, was right up hear. A couple of blocks up and another precinct was a little further over, but it was like we were surrounded by precincts, but only once in a while a cop called. They figured since it’s only a junior high school, it couldn’t have been that bad, but it was bad! One day they came in the class and tried to take my leather, when leather bombers first came out. I had a leather bomber, they
tried to come in and take it right in the middle of class. They disrupted the class; the teacher was up there, the one dude wrestling with the teacher. I just grabbed me a seat and tried to get away and a dude cut my finger right across here and they still didn’t get my jacket though because I was fighting. I took a cut to save my jacket. I didn’t care cause I had just got it and she [Mom] said “Don’t let nobody take your jacket.” From first grade to eighth grade, it was like a transition going from wild to wilder.

Now, was high school that way too?

Nah, I went to Alexander Hamilton Vocational and Technical; that was kinda a good school; it was a lot of wild people that was there, but they were wild people but they had god grades. I mean they had good enough grades to get into that school. . . . the area was wild ’cause we was in Crown Heights. right off Bed. Stuy. so it was kinda wild.

Did you move to a different project?

Oh, naw, we still live in the same place now. You just had to take the bus to go to school. In high school you gotta travel to go to high school. So we just went. After my senior year they closed it because they said that
the attendance rate wasn’t like it should be for that type of school, so they closed it up again. Now it’s called Paul Robeson H.S. for technical students.

Now, is that high school all Black?

Oh yeah. There was a mixture of Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, Haitians, American Black men, you know. A lot of white teachers, though. They was all good teachers too. They all had good backgrounds. That’s what made high school fun.

That’s good you had that opportunity. What about your parents? Were they divorced when you were young?

Un huh.

Do you see your father?

Only when I go to his neighborhood. He still live in Bed. Stuy. But we don’t really keep in touch with him.

Is he married again?

No. He just out there. He’s called an uh, custodian for the New York City Public School System. We don’t really keep in touch with him.

Does he help support you at all?
My mom did all the work. That’s why we grew up so strict. We have our wild things on the side, but we don’t try to get too wild. We did just enough to survive and that’s it.

*What do you define as wild for you?*

*Hangin’ out. Just hanging. Doing the same thing everybody else would do except I’ll leave out the extracurriculars like robbing other people and stealing. You know. Getting high and stuff, you know. Drink a little beer. .paThat’s about as far as we’d go. We tried to basically stay out of trouble.

*That didn’t sound too wild.*

It was wild enough for me ’cause we in a wild atmosphere you know. You know, somebody would come up and try to rob us or fight us. I would feel no remorse in taking a life, but I basically try to stay away from all that. So I just stay away and we just all have our little group.

*Do you have an ambition to get away from that kind of living environment? Do you plan to go back?*

Oh, I’m gonna basically go back and live in New York, ’cause New York, it’s really wild like that in all neighborhoods. Black ones and white ones. You know. So I just like living there. People get robbed going to work on the
train or coming home from work. You know like that so, it's basically just part of the living there. You just have to go with the flow.

*Is or was education much of a motivation as a means of improving your life?*

Yeah, 'cause my mom. She didn't go to college until...it was like 1972 or something. But it wasn't like a college program. It wasn't a degree but some type of certificate she was telling me. And she took a lot of classes. Right now--she, at first she was a secretary. Then she moved up to something like...I don't know what you call it, but like it was almost like executive secretary 'cause she do a lot of more heavier workload and working on these kind of computers and stuff at Mutual of New York, this company. And then she left that company, now she work with the First...Real Bank doing something else. Something...she said it's a lot harder, but it's something to do so she went to college. She always said 'either we gonna go to college or we gonna work soon as we get out of high school so we better have a diploma...graduate with good awards and stuff; high grades. If we didn't get high grades in public school, we'd get punished so I think that kinda stuck with us growing up.
What was your grade average in high school?

High school. . . I was kinda, since I played basketball and I was well-known, basically I didn't have to go to class, but I did go anyway. I had hard, real hard classes. I had drafting; I had a lot of engineering classes and you had to do a lot of studying to get high grades and I didn't really study that much except for regular classes like English and math and stuff like that. So I had about, out of 189 students for, uh, what you call that? I forgot what you call it but uh. . .

Your G.P.A.?

Naw, naw.

Your class rank?

Yeah, your class rank. I was 90 out of 189. That wasn't good, so I got. . . my coach and my mom got on me about that. Then my grade point was only a 77 G.P.A. That's like a C. That's one reason I couldn't go in a lot of the big schools 'cause I was basically just above average at that sport and the same in academics, so they was like, they call that a risk factor, something they used to call it.

Did you have a lot of success playing basketball?
Yeah, I had a lot of success, but I had one of those careers that go up and down. I made All-City Honorable Mention for New York City. Then I made the Athletes Speaking for Better Education, all metropolitan team for Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, and I made some other stuff.

Well that's good!

I had a lot of awards. I had a lot. ...my coach used to always push me. He used to down me a lot 'cause he always knew I could play. He always pushed me for school and, you know, basketball. I knew one day. ...I had this class called Strengthened Materials at Engineering like class, you know, like you know how much this tin can hold and the weight and the formula to do it. I was getting like 65's and 70's on the tests and then my attitude. ...I started hanging with the it-was-still-cool people, but the people that you know--who had a reputation for being wild. So we just hang in the caf, you know. But out a little bit. Then he dissed me for five games straight. For all of that. So I said discipline, for some reason discipline has always stood out as I was growing up. Even until now,

You have a lot of interest in art. When did that arise?
Aw, that was all the way when I was young 'cause my aunt is an artist. Uh, on my mother's side, my mother's sister, she's an artist. My father's uncle is an artist. They collect a lot of art, books, pictures. They got pictures of famous artists that painted, in their home. I used to go to school and look at 'em, try to figure them out, read the books and stuff. I knew how to read at an early age so I would read all that stuff. And then my mom, she was in that college stuff, so she had to do a lot of art work. So me and my brother used to do some of it for her. Me and him and my other brother that's right behind me. When we was young, we used to always, sometimes we couldn't go outside so we do little stuff like have art contest. We had a lot of tools: crayons, markers, pencils, cut paper; one of my aunts worked at this place that sell fast cars, you know. We'd play with all this paper that she got from the company and we'd just draw and draw and draw. That's why I picked engineering and drawing in high school 'cause I thought I wanted to be an architect. But then I found out how much you had to go into to do it. I said, nah, I think I'll just go paint and draw regular stuff people like to see. Advertising. So I had to change it.

Are you considering advertising for a career? or a career as an artist?
Yeah. Just if I can get into that range, 'cause you gotta be real, real, real good. And I got the ideas, the imagination. I'm the type of person that can sit down and draw for like three hours. Then if I get tired then I'll just alter, you know, and just work with something better, quicker, instead of just sitting all that time 'cuase I be like kinda pacing. I want my work to be good, but I want it to be ready when I want it ready. . . .

Do you have very much confidence about your English background?

No. I know when. . . first of all, like say, when we were talking about the Black English Vernacular, you used to always say that and I was like, "I be this," and something I used to say always and my mom used to scream out no matter where she at in the house, I could be on the phone, talking to my brother and even now I sometimes still say it. I can't remember what I say. I'll probably say it again. And she'll yell out "don't say that, that's not the way its said"; you know, blah, blah, blah, all of that. We didn't know a word; she'll be watching TV. We'll say "Ma, what's that word?" And she'll say, "Look it up in the dictionary." And we'll have to look it up and then if we right, then she'll tell us what it means and she'll say "That's how you spell blah, blah." If we're
wrong, we'll just have to keep on looking til we get it right. We always had our own dictionary, our own thesaurus, and our--what's that thing, uh,--card . . . index cards in that little box in alphabetical order. We all had those 'cause in public school we used to have to use 'em so we all had 'em in our room too.

So you had an ongoing learning process?

It was just us four basically. And she didn't want us to go out and embarrass her in front of people so she always gonna be one top of us about this.

Did she utilize Standard English?

Yeah she speaks real well. Sometimes I ask her where she got it from. She just say 'cause I studied when I was

Did your mother grow up in the New York City schools?

Yeah, her and her sisters. She has two sisters and they even tell me that like sometimes I'll go over my aunt's house and she'll tell me about my mom and invite me over, the whole family. And she'll say "yeah, your mother crazy, she this, she that, she always was like that" 'cause my mom used to be like that to them too, you know, since she was the oldest. My grandfather, he was a real disciplinarian 'cause. uh, I guess that's where it came from.
So discipline is a recurring theme in your life or your family's?

It is; even my cousin, one of my cousins went to jail and before he went, we seen that it was gonna happen, so the whole family was on him. on him! on him! And since he was in his neighborhood doing his thing, it just happened. I used to always try. For some reason, I guess that's the way I grew up trying to be a role model like, if everybody see how good I'm doing, they'll try to do the same.

What kind of formal English do you remember from elementary, junior or senior high school?

One day I remember I couldn't spell "characteristics" and another word, for some reason, you know, I used to always have to spell it. Say we was gonna have a spelling test and the teacher would put on the spelling test "write these words ten times." I used to get 90's and 80's on my spelling test. I had to keep writing the wrong words over and over again. And then my ma used to give us a spelling test before we had a test. She said "You got a test tomorrow?" I say yeah, I got a pre-test, so I have to have a pre-test before school, that night. The vowels was the easiest I could remember. Then we moved to plurals and singulars. That was kinda easy except for sometimes I would get mixed up with "es" and "est." Sometimes ess and
ness and like prefixes. I always liked prefixes 'cause I always wondered why it gotta have a prefix and why does it change the meaning of the word. Then that came along.

Did your grammar build, too?

Yeah, in Public School. Yeah, I guess. . . Yeah we had. . .

Exercises, drill, picking out the right word?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, 'cause we used to have books and all that stuff, different books.

Was much of your English work grammar instead of literature?

It was basically both. In public school all grammar. Get it all right and all sentence structure and things like that. And we'd always have to write a paragraph like we do. Write a paragraph. One reason I like now is 'cause we used to always have to write a paragraph on different things or say we had a spelling test and you'll have to write a story or a paragraph with the words in the spelling list. And most of the time I would pick to write a story and I'll use all the words and underline all the spelling words that was in there and get an A. And the teacher
would write on there "very interesting." Sometimes I used to wonder "very interesting." I knew what interesting meant, but I said very interesting—that means she like you or is it different or what, you know.

*Interesting is a safe word. You can say something is interesting without saying too much.*

Yeah, yeah, that's what I say. I was wondering.
So, if someone asks you about someone's personality, you say it's interesting. You haven't said it's good or bad. It's a safe, catch-all word.

*Do you like to read?*

Yeah, that's only 'cause we used to have these things throughout high school like you get this thing your teacher will give you to order books and my mother always, even til this day, or she in the Doubleday Book Club. She always order books; we have so many books in our house; we have more books than anything else in our house, all over the place. Library thing is stacked; all books even the top of the thing is stacked up. Her room is stacked up. My room is stacked. So she always ordering books for us. She always ordered books for herself. And magazines. I like Time Magazine; grew up on Time Magazine. I say one thing—*Time Magazine, Ebony, Jet* and *Essence*, we grew up
on those magazines. So I had to read 'cause sometimes we couldn't even go outside, like if it was, if we went outside for a little while, and it was time to come upstairs, you know, curfew or whatever you call it, we'll have to find something to do so everybody'll just just sit around and watch TV or read something. I know it's something to read somewhere. If we didn't understand we'll just go ask Mom.

After examining the interview responses and the writing sample, one gains insight into the lifestyle of the subject as well as awareness of his style shifts between the Black English Vernacular and Standard American English. The subject was invited to speak as he would with a friend at home; consequently, qualities of the vernacular abound. That ever-popular affirming, transitional, sound-sustaining "you know" is uttered repeatedly, second only to "and stuff," the all-encompassing suffixfix for any hint of a list. Unstressed prefixes predictably disappear in words like "'cause" for "because." Lack of subject verb-agreement characterizes the oral responses, but it does not exist in the formal composition. Expressions such as "mom and pop is divorced," 'They was all good teachers," "He still live in Bed. Stuyvesant," are typical. ". . .'cause I be like
kinda pacing" shows the typical use of be in Black English Vernacular, an expected construction where both students and teachers were mostly Black.

Omission of verbs is another frequent occurrence, such as "we all in the same age range," "we think we smart," "He just out there," and "We in a wild atmosphere. Using good as an adverb as in "do as good" is another departure from Standard American English.

Language instruction both at school and at home was highly regimented—volumes of exercises, rules drilled, and 'in public school all grammar.' Will knows parts of speech, complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, etc. --all the fundamentals of Standard American English which were readily employed in his composition. And while his environment dictated use of the vernacular, his training allowed the shift to Standard American English when required.

This training was rigidly re-enforced at home where Mom would correct any incorrect usage she heard.
"...she'll yell out 'don't say that; that's not the way it's said," even when the boys were overheard in a telephone conversation with a friend. If she wasn't sending them to a dictionary, she was testing them on their spelling list or grammar for school assignments.
Teachers were important positive influences on the subject. A number of times he referred to good teachers and their good background and special programs that provided challenges and rigorous learning opportunities. A basketball coach constantly prompted Will to use his talents not only on the basketball court but in the classroom as well. The coach "used to down me a lot" which meant he was relentless in keeping Will on task, employing what were obvious athletic and intellectual abilities. When Will started associating with the wrong people and letting his grades slip, the coach "dissed" or benched him for five straight games, imposing a discipline on him to steer him from disaster.

"...for some reason discipline has always stood out as I was growing up" were the subject's words as he recognized the vital role it had played in his life. Of course, the primary disciplinarian was his mother, who ruled with a strict, loving hand. All three boys were expected to behave, to abide by curfews, to play inside when conditions outside were not right, always to have a book to read, earn good grades and recognition in school. Failure to meet her expectations meant punishment--discipline was the foundation not only to survive the urban ghetto but also to prevail.
Books were paramount in this mother’s program to prevail against overwhelming odds. His mother belonged to a book club and was always ordering books. "We have more books than anything else in our home, all over the place." This setting was re-inforced by visits to an aunt’s home and the home of his father's uncle, both artists who owned lots of books for Will to explore on his visits. "I knew how to read at an early age so I could read all that stuff." In fact, the boys always had their own dictionary, thesaurus, and a box of index cards of vocabulary words.

Will is equipped with a bidialectal power and has the facility to shift between Black English Vernacular and Standard American English. The vernacular which allows his acceptance in the urban realm he plans to rejoin will shift adroitly to his Standard English which will empower him in the mainstream for personal advancement.

What Motivated Me to Come to College

What fascinated me the most about college was the fact that a college degree is necessary to hold a good position in the work force with benefits and the chance to climb the "ladder." While growing up, it was like a dream even to think about college. Coming from the inner city a lot of people don’t get an opportunity to enter college.

What motivated me the most was the challenge college presented, to reach a goal, a goal
that proves to oneself that if you put your mind to it you can achieve, and the main motivator is a degree, which also is the prize.

When in high school the teachers always expressed how important going to college was. My mother offered me two proposals. One was get a scholarship because college cost so much. or work and go to a less expensive college in the city. I took the easy way which is very difficult because I had to work hard to get a scholarship but it was easier than staying home looking for a job and then balancing that with school. Also the chance to get away and meet new and different people make it more interesting to pursue "the goal."

If someone finds educating themself fun or likes a challenge and can take care of them- selves while pursuing thier "goals," college can be a piece of cake. Some people take the hard route for example being to "lax" or to "lazy" but still find themselves proving that they to can achieve. So college is an institution that all don't achieve and some can't make but for those who do they honor it.

The above composition was constructed by Will as he talked into a tape recorder in a type of stream-of-consciousness exercise, trying to capture the thought process as he was composing. Certainly, the essay is not flawless, but there are no errors that would mark the writer as a speaker of Black English Vernacular. In fact, there are some signs that indicate a rather sophisticated writer. For example, Will has used an appositive for "goal" in the second paragraph. In the third paragraph, he has consciously utilized parallel construction in the third sentence with the gerunds "staying," "looking," and "balancing." He also made used of quotation marks around
a word to suggest special meaning or connotations to the word, such as "ladder," "goal," "lax," and "lazy." The errors that are there represent common errors among freshman writers; some of them probably would have been corrected had the paper been written at home and the writer had a chance to edit--errors such as a missing comma at a page turn or a punctuation omission where there was a dead space caused by the crossing out of a phrase. Even the confusion of "to" for "too" was something the writer knew when questioned about the paper later on. Pronoun reference mistakes were also ones that the student recognized when pointed out rather than acting as if it were a foreign language. The misspelling of "their" as "thier" again represents a common error that time for proofreading would remedy. Still, the final product was an acceptable composition that this artist had drawn and shaped and chiseled and re-shaped and touched up to arrive at the final canvas.
Sondra

Background

While written responses to the interview questions were complete in the university setting, much of the conversations occurred at our residence when Sondra did weekly cleaning. This environment was comfortable for her. She had done a lot of household work and gave the impression it was a way of returning a favor, though never said directly. She always worked in her stocking feet, as if kicking her shoes off to feel at home [although it may have been a precaution against tracking the areas she had cleaned.] Any unease probably lay in my mind, for I worried this arrangement smacked of plantation life where the black maid ambled about in dutiful routine. The best moments for me occurred at the dinner table when we shared a meal, or under the porch awning, sipping a Diet Coke. Common ground helps immensely; at least, it reduced my misgivings.

The warm spring wisps put the heart and mind at ease as the nectar cooled our lips, and we sat there in the back yard where birds fluttered and squirrels skittered. It was natural to express glad feelings without self-consciousness about how poetic the expression might be.
Sondra spoke of how serene the setting was, how she loved nature, and how the yard was a sanctuary for squirrels and birds.

Such taken-for-granted scenes in nature provided curious new moments for youngsters from concrete-veneered inner cities. She told of riding Wilbur's bus (an old turquoise-sprayed school bus that shuttled students the three mile stretch into town) and how the passengers became so excited when a groundhog waddled across the road. Pressed against the breath-steamed windows, they laughed heartily at the lumbering fur ball which if ever seen before was caged at a zoo (70% of the students came from urban Michigan.) The natural phenomena observed around the university brought out the child in these students. Sondra said if she could be something in nature, she would like to be a tree. "You don't see many trees in Detroit. Ultimately, she wanted to be mayor of the city, or at least superintendent of schools--a way to give something back and still tower above the rest.

Giving to others is the core to her being. Tutoring in the writing lab meant for her doing whatever was required to enable a student to master a skill. Sondra spent countless hours with individuals. One term the financial aid office told her she had earned $200 more
than permitted in her package and forced her to return
that money--money that in no way compensated her justly
for the hours given.

Children she babysat for called her Mary Poppins
because she always brought them some little surprise, some
trinket that was special to them--an extra most sitters
would not even consider. Many times it was that "spoonful
of sugar [that] helps the medicine go down." I suspect
her own life had many empty spoons.

Sondra had finished her house cleaning duties and was
awaiting her friend's arrival to give her a ride back to
campus. Several months before, she had asked if we ever
needed any help around the house. Having received grants
and scholarships and served as an R.A. in the dorm to
cover school expenses, she wanted to earn money to pay
insurance and cost of repairs to an old car she had been
given by one of the English faculty. And while we wanted
domestic help, I would never ask if a Black student might
be interested in such work. It just seemed an affront to
their dignity and somehow a regression to what they wanted
to escape. But Sondra approached me and seemed to view the
work as a pleasant departure from the campus--almost a
sanctuary like the one she perceived for those yard
creatures mentioned above. Nearly every visit had some
contemplative time we shared. No doubt, common interests in literature made us kindred souls, and somehow it was so right.

Sondra is the ninth of ten children, raised by her ailing mother who was aided by the older children. A product of the welfare system, she has known the depths of despair. "I was raised on the welfare system. And I'm not ashamed to say that; it, too, is part of what motivates me... I may have been born in the ghetto, but I don't think I ever had any ghetto in me."

Hunger and desperation marked her childhood days in the ghetto. "It was hard—very hard." She remembered one day when she was 16 and her mother was in the hospital for what turned out to be a nine-months stay. Sondra and her two sisters "didn't have the money to buy a loaf of bread." They decided to resort to theft when they became so hungry. The plan was to sneak into a neighbor's apartment and pilfer a can of soup; a double-locked door foiled their efforts. Returning to their apartment, another neighbor heard a sister crying and sought the reason why. From that night on the neighbor shared dinners with the girls until their mother was released from the hospital.
When asked to remember her earliest memories of school and the influences on her development as a speaker, writer, thinker, she described her experiences in a somewhat cathartic exercise:

At the time, Head Start was what my school district’s pre-school programs were called. What I remember most vividly was getting smacked on the head with the Nursery Rhyme Book. Mrs. B. was my teacher’s name, and she saw that I was fidgeting and moving about the floor. Her mistake was not asking me why. There was a little boy touching me, and he kept on trying to sit next to me. I just wanted to listen to the nursery rhymes, but this kid would not leave me alone. The teacher stopped, looked at me, made a generalization about students not listening to her while she is reading, then made an example of me. "I am not going to continue reading if you cannot be still and listen...like this one" (the smack on the head came right here). I was sad, and I went home and told my mother. Mommy did not really have too much to say about the incident. Anyway, I was glad when Mrs. B. left after the first term and Mrs. C. came. (By the way Mrs. B. was Black and Mrs. C. was white, if that has any significance.)
My grade school years had high points until I had to transfer schools in the fifth grade. My sister who is a year older than me was a student of the year as a fifth grader, and I was on my way to following her tracks. I was a future teacher, a lunch staffer, a door captain, and an office worker. The only thing I did not do was street crossing (you know the kid with the orange belt who helps the other kids cross the street safely.)

Anyway, I was on my way, then one day Mommy told us we were moving, and I was mad. I told her how I felt, but she said, "If we had a car, I could bring you back to school every day. But, we don't and you will just have to go to the school right down the street from the house we're moving to." I felt betrayed, but I went on.

The school was different. The kids were different; the whole move was different. The house was nicer, and the class of people were different. Hey, I got to be honest.. my mother was attempting to be a part of the middle-class, (far beyond our means, at the time) and I did not feel comfortable.
The first day of school, and all eyes were on me and my younger sister. I was in the fifth and she was in the sixth. Eva, my year older sister, was at her new junior high school. (She hated it, too.) Nevertheless, we went on, and then there was conflict. I won the school spelling bee, and everyone wanted to be my friend and share my winning free potato chips and candy for a week. Savonnie was the first fiend (not friend). First, she told me—not asked—to get her two candy sticks and a bag of potato chips. We were in the same class and she had done nothing but talk about me from day one. The thing about it is she spoke "so proper and every time she said an 's' word she made that 'sss' sound." So every time she called herself whispering, I could tell if it was "SSSSSondra" (the only one in the world who pronounces "Sondra" that way.)

Well, after she made her command, I looked at her and said, "I ain't." (B.E.) She replied, "So, you think you're bad since you won the spelling bee." That had nothing to do with it, but she and her little cliche [sic] gave me hell for the next six months. It came to an end as I graduated from elementary and went on to another school district junior high. Come to think of it, I had two fights
and my other two sisters had one each within those six months. By the way, within a year, we ended up moving back towards our old neighborhood.

What about your home life and family?

By now you probably have a general idea of what my home life was like. I am from a single-parent home, but before and after my father returned from prison and went back again, he was around off and on. I am the ninth of ten children, and I loved—and still do—every moment of it...the good and the bad. Mommy is a strong woman and she held the family together and gave us basically good standards to live by (looking to God).

Though our family was large, we all were close. Things change and so have the relationships. Sometimes, though, I wish I could go back to when I was 6 or 7 years young and just lie down in the bed snuggled up under Mommy, sucking my two fingers, playing with her ear or just loving the times and the comfort of being a child...wake up...girls. Times just ain't like that no more.(B.E.V.)

As I said, Mommy gave us or taught us the value of God, but she never encouraged or discouraged us
to attend a church. Most of us, however, as we grew up did find a church to join. I guess I am not a church goer right now because I am not settled yet, but I was in regular attendance of the New Hope Baptist Church in Detroit for 6 years. I am, however, a true believer in God, and nothing can take that away because He has done so much for me to bring me this far... By The WILL of GOD And The LORD JESUS CHRIST, I Live.

Was school important to you?

My interest in school is my way out. I have seen hard times and desperate times. Thank God I have seen more of the former than the latter. And school for me was a way of escaping the household depression and the self-depression because, as I have discovered, being busy and involved, you don't have time to get depressed. That was my outlet. Also the fact that school in a sense means opportunity, and I want all the opportunity I can get. I am curious about something that has yet to be revealed, but it will be in my last Best-Seller.

What is your field of study here?

At first my major was Communications-Radio and TV because I was told that I have a potentially good
speaking voice. Newscaster was by goal. But then I wrote a paper in my freshman English class where Dr. Z. was my professor. He read it and was impressed, so he convinced me to try my hand at English Education because I had expressed an interest in teaching. I had also had some doubts about being a communications major because No. 1--there were too many "no accounts" majoring in that and No. 2--I have never liked being with a crowd...the classes were always over-crowded and hot...the people were shallow-minded and uppity...and I knew in my heart that it was not my true destiny. I love and appreciate Dr. Z. for his encouragement and whatever he saw in that paper to recognize my potential. I am glad I wrote. Being an English major at this university makes you an exceptional person, but it is not because of the exceptionality of it. It's because I have met some wise people since becoming an English major. I have learned to think...critically, analytically and interpretatively. I have transcended to a higher level of thought with the help of countless instructors [at this points she listed 14 by name] and so many others whom I have come in contact with in my 4 years of study here at this university.
What has been the influence of your family on your life?

This will be simple. Everyone in my family has had an influence on me in some way or another, whether it has been negative or positive or good or bad. I am the "universal" person in my family and each individual has a special and different relationship with me. So again, they all have influenced me, but foremost in this order, there is GOD, Mommy, and then Daddy.

Have books been important in your life?

My first important book was the book I found in the back of my mother's closet. I cannot recall the name of it because at the time I could not read when I found it. It was my grandmother's book, and it was a book about famous cowboys, Indians, and other renegades. Well, there was a picture of eight Black men hanging from a tall tree and to see that would scare the hell out of a four-year-old child. I asked Mommy what was that? She looked at me and took the book away and put it back. She never told me, but she kept it in the same place. Since I knew where to get
the book, I made it a habit of going back to look at that picture. The thing about it is, I had this innate feeling that that picture meant a lot to us. (You, too.) That book was important because it gave me my first exposure to our past, present, and future. I saw, as I stared at the picture, what my great, great grandfather probably contended with just to live and be only half a man because of the threat of IGNORANCE. Guess what? I still have that book and I still stare at that picture The Men of the Wild, Wild West. They were wild...wild with ignorance and insanity and it still exists.

Are you aware of the difference between Black English Vernacular and Standard American English?

I was aware of the difference in the way we [Blacks] generally speak as opposed to what our counterparts label Standard English. Mr. Price, when I came to college, I realized I don't like the label Black English because there might as well be Yellow English for the Asian American, Red English for the Native American and so on and so forth. No, I take that back, my sophomore year in high school when I went to a journalism workshop for the school
newspaper. That was surface awareness, but it was not until I came to college did I become aware of the difference as a prevalent issue. It is sometimes taken to the extent of being a tool of measurement of ability...and that is kind of sad.

*What book titles stand out for you?*

My most memorable book is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Best Little Girl in the World*, *The Story of Harriet Tubman; Black Moses* and *My Soul Went with Him*. There is no significance to order; they all reflect an entity of myself.

*How would you characterize your high school experience?*

My high school was/is a lot like this college; on the surface, one may think it is a breeze, but there is/was so much to learn within those/these hallowed walls. I have achieved here, the same as I did there. I had more fun in high school because I was academically and extracurricularly involved and those things comprised my social life. Most of the kids I hung out with were all college-bound. Though many of them eventually dropped out, we all aspired to go. The teachers cared and pushed. Most of my teachers were Black, but the person who cared a hell of a lot
for us all at C. High School was Ms. T. (She was white.) She pushed and pushed, but when she saw someone give up, she knew when to quit pushing. But with me, because I did not have the support of my family initially to go to college, she stepped in and filled the void where there was no one. She detected when I was becoming discouraged or depressed and she would pull me back up. It was as if she saw my potential, but I was fragile. Either I would become strong and deal with the drawbacks or I would walk away from the opportunity and find a man to have kids by and maybe get on welfare. She was scared for me and I became fearful of failure because I knew whatever she feared for me, I should fear more because I would live it. By the way, Ms. T. was the senior career/guidance counselor. Ms. T. said that it would be good for me, and I appreciated her approval. But, I decided at an assembly where the dean of students from this college spoke and the name of the school stayed in my head. Then once I arrived here I knew that I needed this school to build my Black pride, my self-confidence as a Black competent woman and the things I have learned here about just being Black or African-American.
**What kind of writer are you?**

As a writer and a person, I am introspective. When I write, I want my reader to see my thought processes, my rationalization and feel my mood. I want the reader to become my friend through my writing. I want to become a novelist, and I realize that there is a lot of room for growth, in terms causing a congruent writer intent on reader effect because I may feel good about what I have written, but the reader may not. So I have to work on creating congruity between the two in my writing.

**What are your aspirations in life?**

My aspirations are constantly changing, but not to the point of confusion. I know what I want to do and where I want to go, but I never want to become boxed in. Ultimately, I want to run and become mayor of Detroit. It is a big goal to set, but that is what I aspire. And like I said in the news story, "And if not that, Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools." The fact that I think all the time, it can be stressful, too. I think and plan, then plot a course of action. That has been a major factor—thinking and planning—though as my cooperating
teacher said, "your planning is poor." Hell, what
does she know? Just kidding, she was right when it
came to writing out lesson plans. That's one thing I
hate...WRITING THOSE DAMN LESSON PLANS.

**What are your immediate plans when you graduate?**

[An academy in New England] Well, after the
interview and tour was over and I was on my way back
to Detroit, my home--basically the only place I have
known in my 22 years besides the vicinity of
campus--I asked myself the very same question. Why?
Why is this happening to you, Sondra? I hate to ask
a question and not get a response, and when I asked
myself that question, riding the plane back,
looking down at New York (I guess I thought the
answer was down there somewhere.) There was no
answer. So, the answer is there in New England at
that academy and I aim to find it.

I do have a little something in the back of my
head, but that too has yet to surface. [another
smiley-face drawn here] I can only say that
everything happens for a reason and I truly believe
in the fate of God.

**What obstacles do you feel you must overcome?**

The fact that the media publicizes racial issues
everyday in some way or another; the fact that it has
only been a little over twenty years since "the move-
ment," and twenty years is like a day when trying to
change the structure and norms of a nation. Like
Toni Brown said, "We have made progress. But
progress is slow and gradual." It has only been a
little over twenty years and prejudice continues. As
a matter of fact, when I went to Boston, I
experienced my first overt case of prejudice. I do
not think it would be feasible to detail the
incident, but it happened to me for the first time in
my life at the age of 21. How about that? That's a
sickness the U.S. of A. can't seem to cure just yet.

In response to the question of the
importance of language usage to Blacks, Sondra
answered: Like I told my students at M. High School,
predominantly Black classes) "You must know how to
speak and write, because sad as it is, those are the
two foremost things that [we] are evaluated on. You
can be sharp and even living up there on the hill
right next door, but you still ain't at their level
unless you can show it through your communication
skills...speaking and writing and in order to do that
proficiently and effectively, you must know how to
read--not just books, BUT PEOPLE, TOO."
My total experience with the world in which I live... I may be quite young, but I have experienced, whether through observation or direct involvement, more than what the average 21-22 year old could imagine. She then ended her many pages of answers with the following special note: Mr. Price, seeing as I am about to graduate, I wanted to show you ME or at least one facet of me besides the one you know. I hope with these things I have said I'll read with the introspective person you know me as. Thanks for being the first White American (overall, the first man) to show me "genuine care and concern" without barrier or stipulation. I am fortunate to have come across you." What I hope Sondra realizes is that I am the fortunate one to have known her.

Commentary

Further insight into the character of Sondra is gained in examining a speech she wrote for the university's annual oratorical contest (which she won). On her note cards were the special directions she had written to herself. "Proudly Approach Podium/Compose Yourself/Now Begin...." Those instructions might well be
indicative of the approach Sondra began taking toward everything in her life years before. The oration, even more.

Give it up; What makes you think you are that exceptional one who can beat the odds? Surely, you don't expect people to feel sorry for you, and stop to give you a free ride. Well, let me be the one to inform you that the price of tea has gone up in China, and the price of gas has gone up in America. People just don't feel sorry any more; sympathy costs. It is best that you face facts and bite the bullet of reality. Blacks still have to walk twenty miles farther to get to the door of success.

The picture may be grim, but there is hope and possibility. The year is 1988, and a Black man is running for president. But again I say to you the year is 1988, and our efforts have decreased in number. Why is this?

In 1954, Virgil Clift, professor of Education at Morgan State, wrote, "There is far too much waste and dissipation of energy on every college campus today because prevailing conditions insist on conformity." He said, "In spite of the great strides we have made, we should not be blinded to the fact that the American Dream has not yet been fully and completely realized. There still exist gross inequalities in educational and economic opportunities." This was said in 1954.

Ten years later, however, Walter Daniel wrote; "The relative position of the Negro American has not changed very much in the past decade though we have made SOME gains."

For the third time, the year is 1988 and we are no longer advocating a better justice system or yelling at the top of our lungs that "The American Dream has not been realized." Instead, we have turned around to combat among and against ourselves.
Today, we find ourselves blinded with the statistical facts that 86% of our Black youth live in poverty while one out of every 22 Black American males will be killed by violent crime. Even sadder, 51% of violent crime in the United States is committed by Black youth, and 1 out of every 6 Black males will be arrested by the time they reach the age of 19. This is not to mention the high percentage of young Black women giving birth to and raising children without the presence of their children’s fathers. The year is 1988.

There was a time, however, when we, Black college students were at the forefront of movement toward progress. We were responsible for moving the nation. But now, we have grown content. We do not speak of equality anymore; we instead want equity.

There was even still a time when we, the Black students realized that education is not a luxury; it is a necessity, for us. Now, however, many of us have grown content. There is no longer a struggle; there is only a journey that we may or may not choose to take, and many of us have chosen not to travel the journey. This is evident in the fact that in 1990 only 16% of the Black students attending universities and colleges will actually go on to become leaders in our communities while the other 84% of us will be seeking the short-cut around the intersection of struggle and contentment. Sorry to inform you, but, short-cuts phased out with the development of the "straight and narrow" road. You can go one way or the other.

It is important that we realize there will be constant frustrations on our way to success as Blacks, but we must also realize that those frustrations should not hinder the fulfillment of our obligations to the generations before us and those coming after us. For the generations before us, we must prove that their sacrifices were not in vain, and for those after us, we must emerge as worthy role models, educators and parents. But over all else, we have an obligation to ourselves to work to go beyond that which is prevalent in our Black race—that is poverty. Yet we still have an obligation to
make the difference, and we must begin by changing the prevailing attitude that 'material is mine and knowledge is not' to 'fashion is fine but education is essential.'

It is necessary that we take Black universities' and colleges' standards of excellence and challenge ourselves to success. The procedure is simple to begin, but I do not contend that it is easy to execute. However, you must realize that we have already taken the first step; we are here at this college. In spite of the odds, we have gone on to attend this institution of higher education when it was once said Blacks could not succeed in higher education. For this, freshmen you are recognized; sophomores, you are commended; juniors, we are applauded; and seniors, you are honored and respected for the knowledge you have acquired.

We are the young Black men and women who demonstrate that we know the value of education, but now we must display how it can work for us. In doing this, our minds should rhythmize to the beat of knowledge as our souls dance through the steps of progress.

When your eyes grow tired from reading the text of knowledge, and the words become blurred, think of the time that has gone by, and where we are. There is no rest for the weary until the challenge is met.

Finally, we must all believe that we are those exceptional ones who will beat the odds. Remember that nothing in this world is free, and sympathy eventually turns into apathy. Grow to realize that inflation exists not only in China but in America, too.

In our challenge to success, keep in mind that the bullet of reality is hard, but so is rock candy. Bite it.

The year is 1968, and Blacks still have to walk twenty miles farther to get to the door of success.
Observations

Sondra graduated with honors in English Education and with a contract to teach at a private school in the East. Yet, there had been so many factors opposed to her chances of success in academia—a father in prison for murder a second time, a family of ten children in a single-parent home, a household plagued by her mother's ill-health, a product of the welfare system, a family that offered no financial support for college, a school setting in which peers were more likely to become pregnant and get ADC than a steady job.

But Sondra loved books and reading. In kindergarten she loved being read the nursery rhymes, despite the rap on the head from a Black teacher who made an example of her squirming behavior, caused by a little boy interfering with Sondra's enjoyment of the story. Even before she could read, she was lured by The Men of the Wild, Wild West, the book hidden in her mother's closet. She was frightened by that picture of eight Black men hanged from a tree, and then she was refused an explanation by her mother who always kept the book concealed in the same place. She made it a habit from the age of four of looking at that book and sensed its importance in revealing somehow the past, present, and future conditions of
Blacks. Early she perceived such cruelty was the result of ignorance. She still has that book portraying a world "wild with ignorance and insanity and it still exists.
Also established, the idea that important information was to be found in books.

While her mother and siblings believed in Sondra and sought some means of a better life style, several educators were most influential in her decision to develop her abilities, expand her knowledge, and refine her actions and language. The impact of teachers in shaping young people is quite significant. While most of Sondra's teachers were Black, those she singled out were white, an indication that the individual's approach and interest are more important than a role model of one of the same race. A high school counselor recognized her potential and paved a way for her to apply and attend college. A college freshman English professor praised her language skills and said she should tutor others in the writing lab and consider English education. Even the nursery school teacher who replaced the stern Black teacher and nurtured the responsive child made a difference.

Sondra does credit her mother as a strong woman who held the family together, established good standards of behavior, and taught the importance of God in their lives. Even her imprisoned father was perceived as one who
merited her love, understanding, and acceptance. Whatever kindness Sondra received in her life was multiplied and then extended to so many in return.

Probably most significant is Sondra's feeling that school was her "way out." It was an escape from household depression and suffering, and it offered the prospects for a better life later on. She also noted "being busy and involved, you don't have time to get depressed." Recent studies reveal that one out of eight children in this country suffers from hunger and may rely on the school food assistance program for nourishment. For ghetto children the schools become the primary source of sustenance for both body and soul.

Both in what she was taught and the examples she observed, Sondra acknowledged the importance of language usage to Blacks. As she told her students in her practice teaching experience, "You must know how to speak and write, because sad as it is, those are the two foremost things [we] are evaluated on. You can be sharp and even living up there on the hill right next door, but you still ain't at their level unless you can show it through your communication skills... speaking and writing, and in order to do that... effectively, ... you must know how to read..."
It is this skill in language she has developed which permits her to "beat the odds." Standard American English has empowered her.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have reviewed the basic criteria used to select the candidates. They were African American whose peers were African American generally and whose home dialect was BEV. They were A-B English students capable of tutoring others and recommended by English department members for their SAE ability. Products of the public school system, they could distinguish between BEV and SAE and, in effect, possessed bidialectalism.

Table 1 also portrays that the case studies shared a number of personal elements which reveal several similarities in their backgrounds. All grew up in single parent households in urban ghettos, where because of low income they lived in public housing and attended college only because of financial assistance. The profile of these students would suggest to many a likelihood of failure and slim chance to complete college education. In Appendix A are test scores and course grades which tend to
verify further the language skills of the four case studies. This information was not available at the time of the selection process.

The four case studies had been asked 56 questions at random that explored five basic categories of inquiry: (1) dialect awareness, (2) education influence, (3) home and other influences, (4) factors affecting speaking and writing, and (5) code switching. Tables 2-6 present the questions for each category and side-by-side the responses of each case study to each question. Again, there are striking similarities between most of the responses to the questions that help to determine what factors influenced the development of SAE in the students.

While the tables serve to focus on the responses to the questions, the transcripts of the interviews are presented in total to allow the reader to appreciate the rich, unique qualities of each of the four students. These reveal drive and determination, their optimism, their sense of humor, their intelligence, their creativity, their language, their backgrounds, and the adversities they had overcome and continue to confront. Hearing their words, envisioning their experiences, recognizing their accomplishments not only enable the reader to appreciate what and who they are, but also learn what might be done to help others experience comparable success.
Particular note must be made to educators: each student in the case studies made special mention of the important role that a teacher had played in his/her background. The teachers had a high degree of commitment to and interest in the students and the development of their potential. Without question, teachers had made the difference in the lives of these students whose being at-risk was transformed into being at-ease in a learning environment.

The next chapter will highlight those common factors which enhanced the development of these speakers and writers. From their success may come ideas for similar growth and development of others.
CHAPTER V

DATA SUMMARY

Backgrounds

Melvin, with his sister, grew up in the ghettos of Philadelphia where they were raised by their grandmother. The financial circumstances also made day-to-day living tough. Apart from a few years in the primary grades, Melvin's peers were almost entirely Black speakers of the vernacular who had very little interest, if any, in education, assuredly not college education. Again financial assistance was absolutely necessary if he were to have an opportunity to fulfill his grandmother's dream for him to accomplish what none of his peers was interested in.

Carlo, more than any of the case studies, had every reason not to survive, let alone conquer. His life was one rejection after another. From birth, his mother never wanted him, although she did keep those children born after him. Starting out in a foster home and then going to an orphanage, Carlo was juggled around among six different homes, staying no more than three years at any one place. His world was poverty, and no one he knew as a friend had
more than one parent, or even a "junker" to drive. He was an outcast when most people have at least one place to call home. Rejected by his world, he became determined to turn is back on the background that had marked or, even more accurately, scarred him.

Will grew up in the housing projects of New York City with his two brothers and his single, hard-working mother. His was a world of gangs and violence, so wild that there were many times when it was just unsafe to go outside or even to school where thugs would enter classrooms and rob the students and assault the teacher. Alcohol, drugs, extortion, armed robbery, muggings were a way of life. Armed guards patrolled the school as well as the housing projects where they lived. Money was scarce, and when he was able to save to buy something, like the bomber jacket, he had to risk his life to protect it. While college was a remote dream, scholarships were needed if there were to be any possibility of legitimate advancement in the world.

Sondra, one of ten children, came from the Detroit ghetto. It was a harsh, concrete "jungle" where this family knew what it was to have no money and no food in the house. The father was in prison for murder. The sickly mother was hospitalized for long periods of time while the children, left unattended, had to fend for themselves. The home was usually in a state of disarray,
so the school became a refuge. Plus, there was something in Sondra's make-up that caused her to respond in a positive manner to what was happening there and who was making it happen. Later, there was absolutely no money for her to go to college, even though counselors recognized her potential for success. Financial aid was the only way she could have any chance, and that assistance made the difference. So, all four of these individuals had reason or even excuses to fall victim to their antagonistic, clawing existence that victimize or destroy the inhabitants.

Just as the backgrounds are very similar, so are the positive factors which enabled them to overcome obstacles which could readily interfere with not only language development but also any degree of academic achievement. Table 7 presents a list of eight positive factors shared by all four students in the case studies. An "x" in a column indicates that the individual possesses that particular feature. Otherwise, a more specific factor is listed in the table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Factors for SAE</th>
<th>Melvin</th>
<th>Carlo</th>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Sondra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grammar instruction/ separate discipline</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nurturing influence</td>
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<td>foster parents teacher</td>
<td>mother coach</td>
<td>mother counselor teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Background of reading good literature</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>4. Enjoyment of reading</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Creativity</td>
<td>acting poetry</td>
<td>music poetry</td>
<td>artist poetry</td>
<td>speech fiction writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Awareness of dialect differences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>7. Career motivation</td>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>psychologist</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Extensive writing experience</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Grammar instruction as separate discipline.

Instructional and/or personal influences emphasized the mastery and use of Standard American English. All four subjects mentioned grammar instruction in school; in fact, often English classes consisted of teaching identification of parts of speech and functions along with rules of correct usage, followed by pages and pages of drill and practice exercises. They were schooled in prescriptive approaches and choosing between the right and the wrong answer, in contrast to the modernists who advocate a methodology that is process-oriented in which students compose, and grammar instruction depends on what the student initiates or what mistakes occur. Sondra had learned in school the same maxim she gave her students during her practice teaching experience: "You must know how to speak and write, because, sad as it is, those are the two foremost things that we are evaluated on."

Speaking and writing, "proficiently and effectively," are essential. She was also an imitator and absorbent listener. She paid close attention to SAE speakers and sought to imitate them. When she was curious about something or someone, she was reticent to speak, but long on staring. Careful observation and attention to detail
made her very conscious of other people and their language. Since school was so important to Sondra, she took advantage of opportunities to learn.

Will, likewise, was exposed to year after year of grammar instruction in some type of gifted program, one in which he "had a much heavier workload." Exactly what criteria were used is uncertain. (Sometimes it is good conduct that results in rewards, including placement in a more academic class setting.) Regardless, Will praised his teachers who "really tried hard to give us a good education, give us enough work." Elementary school meant vocabulary files, multiple writings of correct spelling for misspelled words, "all grammar. Get it all right and all sentence structure and things like that." Then whatever was taught at school was reinforced at home by his mother who was incessant in her correcting speech, practice testing of skills, directing use of the dictionary. He was getting what so many teachers from urban districts bemoan as missing--support and reinforcement at home from a mother who "didn't want us to go out and embarrass her in front of people, so she always gonna be on top of us about this." She wanted for her children the power of language, the same way she had gotten it: "because I studied when I was in school."
For Melvin, standard English meant knowing one was right and one was wrong. "They gave us like papers so we could circle the right one . . . ; then you could tell them why . . . Then you start to know . . . . He was never told he had to learn "white" English; he was just told this is standard English and it's right. " . . . this English over here was wrong." Melvin also had reinforcement outside school. The church was a place where preaching was mostly in standard English. It was also a place where the youngsters would employ standard English "even when we spoke to some adults, we would try to be polite and everything. Again it is the valuable home influence with his grandmother who spoke standard English. She tried to help educate the children, and "she always corrects us." For a short time he attended an integrated private school where meeting the parents of playmates as well as the children who "spoke in a standard English way."

Again, Carlo experienced concentrated, recurring instruction in grammar and composition in public school. Like Sondra, he has keen powers of observation and imitation when desired. By the age of twelve he was aware that he talked differently. Living with his natural mother for a short time in New York City caused him to call BEV "horrible" and "ghetto" in a most derogatory sense. There had always been a lot of emphasis on the way
he talked, particularly in the white environs of the
children's home. In New York he was ridiculed for his
speech: "You talk so proper," which as he characterized
it "in itself sounds so backward or down home." By
adolescence Carlo had assumed a kind of arrogance about
his language and an air of condescension toward Black
English Vernacular, alluding to living in the city with
people "that had horrible grammar." Also important to
remember is his effort to cast away anything he could, as
retaliation for the rejection he felt for eighteen years.

2. Nurturing influence. An individual or
individuals who took personal interest by encouraging or
prodding the subject to pursue a path of excellence.
Everyone needs and appreciates support from other people,
but when so much of the world is falling around one, the
support is even more important. These four people could
have been buried in the rubble, but circumstances would
have it otherwise.

For Sondra it was various people—a white guidance
counselor, several other teachers, and her mother. The
teachers "cared and pushed." Most were Black, but the
high school teacher who stood above the rest was her
senior counselor who pushed and "because I did not have
the support of my family initially to go to college, she
stepped in and filled the void where there was no one.
She detected when I was discouraged or depressed and she would pull me back up. It was as if she saw my potential, but I was fragile." Others saw her potential and made a difference, too. The college professor who praised her work and encouraged her to become an English education major had a profound influence. And, of course, her mother, who, though in poor health, managed to provide the values and a strong religious faith, was never omitted from her list of important individuals. All, by word and deed, left that indelible mark and commitment to helping others.

For Melvin, his grandmother saw in him the intelligence and talent to make for himself a life unlike his grandparents', parents', or any other member's of their family had known or would ever know. His parents had lacked the resources, caring, and maturity to rear him, but his grandmother never gave up on him. Disappointing his grandmother was the worst thing he could do. That's why his cocaine addiction was so demoralizing to him. Even then she was confident he could get the help to whip this problem as well.

Will had his basketball coach and his mother. The coach acknowledged his talents in school and in athletics. He even disciplined him when Will did not perform up to his academic potential. Without question, though, his
mother was the dominant force leading him to achieve. She was strict, demanding, and exemplary while still protective and supportive. She was actively involved in his learning and attentive to his thinking and speaking and achieving. She was always going to be "on top of him."

Carlo, of the four, was less likely to acknowledge specifically a person or persons who had been a special influence in his life. Certainly, his foster parents and the supervisors at the children's home had helped him. On the other hand, it may have been the negative elements which had an even greater affect. He abhorred ignorance and stupidity, so anyone displaying either one became examples of what to avoid. His "epitome list" confirms the need to ridicule what he deemed stupid in others; if he singled out individuals for friendships, it was their intelligence and creativity that drew him to them. One positive aspect lay in education. Any instructor who tolerated and admired his idiosyncratic, creative flair usually got his attention and energy, resulting in Carlo's personal growth. So, he shared with the others the positive influence that teachers brought to their lives.

3. A background of reading good literature.
Reading books that employ acceptable English is an important aspect of acquiring SAE. All four subjects
consider reading a very important part of their language foundation. Reading was not only integral to course content but also an important leisure activity and source of entertainment. Sondra recounted an important nursery school memory of interference by a classmate seeking to distract her from the story the teacher was telling. From an early age she was fascinated with books and always realized how important they were to her learning. Then there was that book about Black cowboys and what the pictures of executions contained therein have taught her about ignorance and prejudice. Many books were sources of greater self-awareness—*Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Story of Harriet Tubman: Little Moses*, and *My Soul went with Him*. She has never stopped profiting from the wealth of information to be found in books.

Will grew up in a home that was filled with books—"more books than anything else." He could read at an early age and so was prepared to reap the benefits from any bookish environment he encountered, including the books about artists he discovered at relatives’ homes. When the schools would order paperbacks for students, his mother would always buy some for the boys. She belonged to book clubs and was constantly replenishing her supply. Reading was an important leisure activity; the brothers
always had some book-reading in progress along with magazines like *Ebony* and *Time*, the magazine will grew up on.

Melvin was an early reader, starting at five years old. His reading ability contributed to his academic success. Additionally, reading occupied a vital role in his life. Magazines like *Jet* and *Ebony* were staples of his reading diet. Novels such as *The Color Purple* and *Raisin in the Sun* reflect his curiosity about his culture. Judy Blume’s young adult fiction explored the problems and experiences of teenagers and provided ideas for dealing with the chaos of adolescence.

For Carlo, reading was the main source of learning. Often, he read textbooks after the course, because he saw it as an opportunity to broaden his own understanding of a topic. When asked what books had been important to him, he replied ones by Blacks (*The Black Experience*, Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, and Maya Angelou’s *I Heard the Caged Bird Sing*.) As he sought to overcome his surroundings, he seemed fascinated by the experiences of other Blacks. Then he mentioned Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*: Meursault’s noncompliance with expected behavior of society may have provided a source for some identification by Carlo, for in many ways he was a stranger himself. He isolated himself from so much of the Black society and, in turn, was often
rejected by his peers. He did not read a book because it was assigned. He read a book because he was attracted to it and eager for its stimulation.

4. Enjoyment of reading. All four case studies considered reading an important and enjoyable personal activity for pleasure and edification. In a time when television and popular music consume the interests of young people, it is significant to acknowledge the value of reading in the lives and development of these students.

5. Creativity is another quality shared by the four subjects. Each has a fertile imagination and refreshing techniques for what they produce. While one specific definition of creativity may be elusive, I think certain art forms such as poetry are considered creative efforts by most. All four individuals enjoy different artistic measures of expression. Their keen powers of observation heightened both awareness and appreciation of people, places, and experiences.

All four subjects write poetry—as a release, as a succinct expression of emotions and perceptions, as a vehicle for imaginative insights and transformation of the mundane into the ethereal. Sondra submitted both poetry and prose to the annual creative writing contest. Her writings were given another important voice (literally) as she entered and won prizes in the college’s oratorical
contest. Will's forte is drawing. Coming from a family of artists and now majoring in art at school, Will was always supplied with computer paper, crayons, and markers for entertainment; art exhibits and contests even provided important "play" activities for the children. He even wanted to go into advertising because of his imagination and "lots of ideas." Melvin, besides his poetic outlay, enjoyed drawing cartoon figures and acting. He had toured throughout the region with the university drama troop and savored the roles he played as vicarious opportunities not offered in his life.

But, probably, the one most lured by the creative impulse was Carlo. He was constantly creating plays, poetry, short stories, and songs. He said of himself, "I don't know anyone else my age who's any more creative." And when an idea hits him, he is likely to stop whatever he is doing, even in the middle of a test, and start developing that unique concept. All his creative juices are seasoned with his sense of humor, peppered with sardonic barbs. His creative realm becomes so vivid that its characters take on lifelike characteristics and become his acquaintances. Such was the case of Fannie in one of the poems included above. She became a guardian angel who took care of everything in much the same role he had hoped would enter his life. He also was eager to have people
partake of his artistry and offer some praise as evidence of acceptability. For these students, as for most of us, there was a yearning to have others appreciate some special quality that would merit recognition and respect.

6. Awareness of the difference between Black English Vernacular and Standard American English and when to use them. This awareness of language differences precludes the power of diglossia. The subjects are aware of the distinctions and when to employ a particular language. Those distinctions became a consideration early in grade school when the differences were taught, and the usage appropriate for school was dramatically different from that functioning in the peer group.

For Sondra, she recognized the big "difference in the way we (Blacks) generally speak as opposed to what our counterparts label Standard English," but she did not like the color connection from the label. If the speech of Asian-Americans is not called "yellow" English, then why should her native language be labeled Black English? It was not until college that she realized just how prevalent the issue was. She was dismayed that one's language was "taken to the extent of being a tool of measurement of ability... and that is kind of sad." There were times in casual conversation that the verb "be" surfaced as the main verb, but Sondra was so accustomed
to a tutoring or teaching circumstance, that standard English was almost automatic. In contrast, I witnessed the usually calm personality suddenly explode into a set of angry epithets prompted by a heated altercation with another Black tutor. The shift may have been a reflex, but it could also have been a deliberate change in order to communicate an appropriate message and emotion to the person raising the ire. For the most part, Standard American English had become the language for Sondra.

On the other hand, Melvin and Will would be identified as speakers of Black English Vernacular. That dialect was so prominent that one might wonder how much actual contact each had had with people using Standard English. Both used the phrase "white English" to distinguish it from their usual mode of expression.

Melvin's understanding of Black English Vernacular was a language different from what the majority of other people in this country speak. "They call it non-standard; they say it shouldn't be used." When he is with friends or family or "just taking it easy," he can just talk without worrying about it. For him, Standard English is a source of pressure and worry, something that obligated him to a disciplined stance.

Melvin never considered Black English inferior—just different. In fact, whenever someone spoke of nonstandard
English, he did not know Black English was nonstandard. It was standard for him and everyone important to him. As he got older, he read in books and pamphlets that Black English was not necessarily wrong. "That's the way Black people spoke....that's what our race of people speak." He was conscious that different settings demand different language. When he went home, a style shift was mandatory. The problem arose when his friends said he talked "white." The church was still another place to make a shift to Standard American English. He reduced it to an issue of politeness, but it also carried the connotations of the "right" or "good" or even "moral" thing to do.

Will's style shift occurred most readily when he was writing an essay. Generally, he was rather shy and avoided unnecessary conversation. I was even a bit surprised at his willingness to take part in the interviews. Urging him to use his natural language apparently opened the gates that might ordinarily cause him to resist. Maintaining the vernacular was a survival strategy for Will. Living in a city like New York where "gang" identity was central to existence, an individual must preserve that association. No matter how standard or "white" one's language could be, he must still be able to "jive" in the vernacular. The standard English for Will was mastered for academic success, but it was out of place
in the shetto. Apparently, New York would be his home after college. "So I just like living there. People get rolled going to work in the train or coming home from work...it's basically just part of the living there. You just have to go with the flow." However, he had to be cognizant of his language around his mother who unceasingly badgered him about using the "right" language. The knowledge he possessed of the rules and conventions of both BEV and SAE allowed Will to "go with the flow."

Carlo was probably the most conscious of language styles because he worked constantly at mastering Standard American English. While in college he became a close friend of a young Black man who had spent several years in London and had acquired a slight British accent to his speech. The sound was refined and pleasing and undoubtedly worthy of imitation in his thinking. Consequently, Carlo's speech developed a refinement and near stuffiness and even an elitist nature accompanying a Black man whose delivery did not sound "Black." He repeatedly scorned the grammar and vernacular of the ghetto and distanced himself from the "stupidity" of much of his race. Even his wardrobe and bizarre behavior were used to separate him from the "rabble." A bit perplexing is his attempt to discover what the Black culture has contributed to Standard English and at the same time
divorce himself from the culture. Dignity, pride, something positive from the past are likely links. He attributed his ability to shift style with his numerous home situations and required adaptability. Whatever the changes, he quickly decided to reject the Black English Vernacular which he associated with ignorance and adopt the Standard, the language of people he wanted to emulate. Pursuing his aspirations was the only thing important to him, "And for whatever reason, I still believe I have a chance in this white world, in this society... I want to be a writer."

7. Career motivation. Carlo was serious about succeeding in the white world. After two years at an historically Black institution, he transferred to a predominantly white, avant-garde liberal arts college. There he flourished in an atmosphere conducive to free-thinking, artistic people where he could develop his writing talents and investigate any intellectual whim that occurred to him. This progressive bastion of tolerance offered Carlo what he has been seeking for years and graduated him with a B.A. degree in hand, freeing him to use Black English Vernacular only for comic effect as he sought to ridicule speakers of BEV for the "ignorant" sound of their dialect.
Along with Carlo, other case studies considered mastery of SAE a necessary element to fulfill their career goals. All four were dedicated to entering a profession in which they were convinced that SAE was a requirement. So ultimate success in college and in a profession was a positive force in motivating the case studies to acquire SAE.

8. Extensive Writing Experience. Another powerful influence on all the subjects was the amount of expository writing by each. The students were asked to write journals and compositions, stories utilizing assigned vocabulary words, research papers, various types of sentences for grammar studies—"write, write, write" as Will said to me. The writing was expected to be completed in SAE and thus a factor in solidifying its acquisition.

An additional exercise was devised to assess the facility which the subjects used for code shifts. Under the leadership of Professor Cecily O’Neill, seven of the original group of prospective case studies, including the ones described in this paper, engaged in role playing which had various language requirements. Students acted their parts in situations like a popular rock group meeting for the first time with a group of designers and architects to plan a home for this group experiencing new-found fame and fortune. Some portrayed Black rap
artists; others, college educated professionals engaged in a dialogue of improvisation discussing preferences and recommendations. Most of these were not actors, but the results were marvelous. Here were budding thespians creating and delivering lines on the spot, lines appropriate to their the station and background that each character possessed. When roles were reversed, they made style shifts adroitly, confirming their competence and linguistic agility. Their performance was near professional; but even more significant, their language was natural and absolutely convincing, and their background and education had prepared them to adopt the appropriate and necessary language to communicate effectively.

Eight common factors affected the subjects in all four case studies: instruction and practice of traditional grammar and usage; encouragement and inspiration from prodding, caring people; extensive reading from good literature; enjoyment of reading; creativity; recognition of appropriateness of language to a particular context; career motivation; extensive writing experience. Waving these banners, the young African-American student can go forth boldly into the white realm and "let the blandishman fit the clime."
Implications for Further Study

There will always be various dialects and levels of usage in any language, and as American culture continues to become even more diverse, the chances of one main dialect or SAE will continue to be controversial. As James Sledd (1980) has observed, Black English will remain a subject to be studied. While it has been popular for the linguists, little has occurred which would improve the conditions of lives for speakers of BEV. Sledd said it thirteen years ago: Robin Harris, the researcher for the Children’s Research Fund, made the same observation in Facts: A Progress Report on Ohio’s Black Children in 1993.

This study focused on students who were confronted with the same obstacles, the same prejudice, the same inequities faced by more and more African Americans dwelling in the urban centers of our country. Importantly, though, they have "overcome."

Further study might explore whether these same criteria have affected other successful students and if they have been factors for students headed for destruction. More needs to be done to analyze the positive steps that have worked or might work for others. This is information that classroom teachers need to know. As the director of a midwestern city Urban League has
said: the emphasis should be on improving the quality of parenting. Realizing the positive factors in improving the acquisition of necessary skills for achieving.

Postscript

When one has the opportunity to get to know individuals as these case studies were known, it is natural to be curious about their lives after leaving our university. Melvin, who left our school with a drug problem, has overcome his addiction, returned to a large university in the East, and expects to graduate as a communications major next quarter. Carlo graduated from a liberal arts college where he transferred and has just completed his first year of a master’s degree program in psychology at NYU. Will left school after three years because he was cut from the basketball team and lost his scholarship. Without financial assistance he could not continue at our school, but hoped to resume study at a community college back home. I have been unable to reach him for further news. Sondra graduated with honors in English education and received a teaching position at a prestigious prep school in New England. She was looking forward to starting a master’s degree program.

At least three of the four have reached an important plateau. They overcame the negative odds and continue on
their pathways "to be the best that they can be." The life-giving roots of their tree of knowledge and education, nourished by teachers and supportive individuals, have been fruitful and multiplied.
APPENDIX A

Students' Grades and Scores

Grades in English Courses of Students in Case Studies

**Melvin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Grammar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Research</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Literature</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement and Speech Forum</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater Practicum</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Speech</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics in Literature</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Journalism</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Mass Communication</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Literature</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Composition</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Independent Study</td>
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**Carlo**

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Research</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Literature</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-American Theater</td>
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<td>World Literature</td>
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<td>Novel in the 20th Century</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Creative Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes and Perspectives</td>
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**Will**

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<td>Composition and Literature</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Communication Skills</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Speech</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept/Theory (Communications)</td>
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<td>Grade</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Literature</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorian Literature</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Linguistics</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Composition</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the English Language</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
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<td>American Literature I</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Aspects</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes and Perspectives</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Literature II</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoclassicism</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and Methods in English</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Placement Test Scores

All entering freshmen were given diagnostic tests for placement purposes. Lower scores might result in enrollment in developmental English or developmental reading in the university-college. Students were also given two hours to write a composition. Papers were graded by two readers with 3 on a 6-point scale by each reader for a passing grade. So a total of 6 by two readers was passing with 12 the highest possible score.

There were 35 questions on the grammar skills section with 25 the passing score. Passing meant placement in regular freshman English rather than developmental English, the remedial course for over half the entering class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Melvin</th>
<th>Carlo</th>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Sondra</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Skills</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing 25/35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay (6 passing with 12 highest)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading- Grade level</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Comparison of Literacy of SAE and BEV Speakers

After reading Hirsch’s 64-paged, double-columned list of "What Literate Americans Know," I decided to see what Black college freshmen know. I selected sixty items from his list; ten dealt with Black culture, a few with the arts, some of traditional grammar, names from current events, references from American, English, and world literature. 100 University-College freshmen and 28 English 101 students were polled (about 20% of the entering class). Their directions read: "Tell briefly whatever you know about the following dates, words, or phrases. If you do not recognize the item, leave it blank." For comparison, I also polled 53 suburban white high school seniors, using the same list of directions. According to Hirsch, this list reflects some of the basic knowledge Americans should possess by the end of high school—"the kind of knowledge that enables students to make sense of what they read" and empowers them to write more effectively.

The table which follows reveals how much knowledge the students had acquired about the items which Hirsch boldly
proclaims should be recognized by high school graduates. Most papers left more items blank than the number attempted. Many of the answers suggest some aural experience rather than a reading knowledge. Some of the responses rival those of Mrs. Malaprop:

1776 - Vice centennial
Achilles - He wrote Roots
John Birch Society - Knew Kingdom
I Have a Dream - Martian King
Currier & Ives - spices
lower case - drug case where defendant has less than 20 grams
patience of Job - "I wish I had one for this year."
rabbi - a disease carried by animals such as dogs
Richard Wright - one of the Wright brothers
woman suffrage - beatings from husband
Moral Majority - There isn't one.

On the chart the first column indicates the number of appropriate responses out of 100 University-College freshmen. The second includes 28 first quarter freshmen enrolled in English 101. The third column gives the results of 53 white suburban high school seniors. The range of scores for 100 basic English students was 3 to 35 (only 9% had scores above 23). 60% fell in the 9 to 17
score with a mean score of 12. The 28 regular first
quarter English students ranged from 3 to 41. 60% scored
7 to 22 with the mean of 16.

On the other hand, the 53 suburban white high school
seniors had a range of 24 to 46 appropriate responses.
60% fell into the 29 to 40 range, and the mean was 34,
over twice as high as Black College freshmen. Obviously,
there is a large gap between the cultural knowledge of the
Blacks and that of the Whites. Furthermore, a teacher
must acknowledge a void in background knowledge—a void
which will impede progress in understanding and
development of communication skills.

Whether one accepts Hirsch’s list as elitist or even
remotely appropriate, the fact remains that African-
American students’ cultural literacy is less than that of
suburban white students. It matters little what
instrument is used; the results are the same. Many
American high school products lack the knowledge which is
vital to learning, particularly in the college setting and
especially for the speaker of Black English Vernacular.
The problem is not easily or quickly solved. Background
reading and knowledge must be improved from the earliest
years. Cultural literacy must not be slighted.
Institutions which are preparing teachers must reexamine
their "methods." College English teachers must acknowledge that students will need special consideration. All composition teachers must also deliberately implant literacy for learning's sake.

Using the contemporary vehicle, the "rap," and paraphrasing the words of William Raspberry, as well as grasping the vernacular, I join in singing a literacy anthem:

No Bum Rap

The information core deserves a turn—
The more you know, the more you can learn.

Initiate in early years
To minimize your doubts and fears.

Get gnarly bits in memory logged;
A knowledge base won't get you dogged.

Just get the facts so you're informed 'bout now and then and in calm and storm.

Heel-toe express through sundry book
Will win you praise and knowing looks.

A cultured soul can't make you illen;
Instead it's cool and oh so chillin'.

So brace yourself midst history
And join the ranks of lit'racy.

Now light the spark and let it burn;
The more you know, the more you learn.

Ronald Price
September 16, 1988
Notes:
  gnarly - a good trick
  dogged - put down or drilled
  illen - vague, can be terrible or really cool
  chillen' - good or calming
  heel-toe - walking
### LITERACY MEASURES

Comparison of Student Responses to Hirsch's Literacy Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>100 UCE</th>
<th>28 Reg.</th>
<th>White H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1776</td>
<td>63*</td>
<td>16 (57)**</td>
<td>53 (100)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1492</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11 (39)</td>
<td>37 (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1861-1865</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6 (21)</td>
<td>42 (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 1939-1945</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10 (36)</td>
<td>49 (92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16 (57)</td>
<td>48 (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Achilles' Heel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6 (21)</td>
<td>35 (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Albatross around one's neck</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
<td>3 (06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Muhammad Ali</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
<td>23 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Anti-Semitism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
<td>13 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Aristophanes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (07)</td>
<td>2 (04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Emancipation Proclamation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16 (57)</td>
<td>24 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Allah</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17 (61)</td>
<td>15 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. All that glitters is not gold</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>07 (25)</td>
<td>20 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. John Birch Society</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (00)</td>
<td>3 (06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. brave new world</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>02 (07)</td>
<td>3 (06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Elizabeth Barrett Browning</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10 (36)</td>
<td>19 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Charlotte Bronte</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
<td>7 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Robert Burns</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 (07)</td>
<td>5 (09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. CIA</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9 (32)</td>
<td>47 (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Geoffrey Chaucer</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
<td>14 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Compound-complex sentence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
<td>19 (36)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I have a dream (text)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Currier and Ives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Cyclops</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16 (57)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>David Copperfield</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
</tr>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Death of a Salesman</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Dante</td>
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<td>0 (00)</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Fredrick Douglass</td>
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<td>16 (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Fall of the House of Usher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Ludwig van Beethoven</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13 (46)</td>
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<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>fiction</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15 (54)</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Sigmund Freud</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Gather ye rosebuds while ye may</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>The Grapes of Wrath</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7 (25)</td>
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<td>Warren G. Harding</td>
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<td>Ernest Hemmingway</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13 (46)</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12 (43)</td>
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<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>lower case</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mark Twain</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>object (grammar)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>passive voice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>patience of Job</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 (07)</td>
</tr>
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<td>43.</td>
<td>personal pronoun</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>phoenix (mythology)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>predicate (grammar)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>pun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>rabbi</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>The Raven</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2 (07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Paul Robeson</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>run-on sentence</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6 (21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Hamlet (title)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14 (50)</td>
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<td>52.</td>
<td>Nat Turner</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</td>
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<td>15 (54)</td>
</tr>
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<td>54.</td>
<td>tense (grammar)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 (29)</td>
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<td>55.</td>
<td>Jesse Owens</td>
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<td>transitive verb</td>
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<td>57.</td>
<td>Richard Wright</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>woman suffrage</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Where there’s smoke there’s fire</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 (07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Moral Majority</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (00)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*number of correct answers and percentage (100 respondents)
**number of correct answers/percentage in parenthesis
GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE
Percentage of Correct Responses

& Correct

Literacy Items

White High School  Regular Freshmen  UCE Freshmen
ARTS, C. EVENTS, WORLD CULTURE
Percentage of Correct Responses

% Correct

Literacy Items

White High School  Regular Freshmen  UCE Freshmen
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE/BLACK CULTURE
Percentage of Correct Responses

% Correct

Literacy Items

White High School  Regular Freshmen  UCE Freshmen
AUTHORS AND TITLES
Percentage Correct

% Correct

Literacy Items

- White High School
- Regular Freshmen
- UCE Freshmen
ALLUSIONS
Percentage of Correct Responses

% Correct

Literacy Items

- White High School
- Regular Freshmen
- UCE Freshmen
APPENDIX C

Reading Survey

A major influence in the lives of the students in the case studies was the interest in reading and its impact on acquisition of Standard American English. For generations linguists have argued the importance of reading in determining language usage. Both the amount and the attitude toward reading may be considerations of students' potential for academic achievement. Taking into account the profile of this university's incoming freshmen with 75% enrolling in developmental reading and/or English, I surveyed 41 students in research and composition sections to measure how they perceived their reading abilities and activities. These students generally had started in a course for those whose placement scores indicated deficiencies and obstacles to impede college level work. The following questionnaire was distributed to class members. In addition students wrote a composition discussing why they liked or disliked reading.
Instrument

1. Did you know how to read before 1st grade?
   Yes-26    No-10    ?-4

2. How old were you when you learned to read? (age)____
   age 2-1   age 4-6   age 5-12   age 6-11   age 7-2   ?-9

3. What is the first book you remember reading?

4. What book do you remember reading after starting 9th
   grade?

5. How many complete books have you read since 9th grade?
   0 -1  1-3   -9  4-6  -12  7-9  -7  more than 10   -12

6. How do you rate your reading speed?
   very slow - 0   slow - 7   average -29   very fast -5

7. How do you rate your comprehension of what you read?
   poor -1   fair -21   good -13   excellent -6

8. Which type of literature do you prefer to read for
   pleasure?  non-fiction -7   biography -4
   novels -12   short stories -14   magazines -15

9. Overall, how do you rate yourself as a reader?
   poor -2   fair -19   good -16   excellent -4

10. What word best describes your attitude toward reading?
    Hate -3   Enthusiasm -6   Necessity -14   Pleasant -14
    Tolerated -4

   Signature (optional)________________

   Date________________
The first three questions were designed to discover early reading activities as they remembered them. Of the 41 students, 63% (26) say they could read before first grade; 24% (10) did not read before entering school and 10% (4) could not remember. Then, 56% (23) could read at 5 or 6 years; 15% (6) say they could read at age 4; one said she could read pictures at two years, which probably meant she could re-tell stories when she saw pictures in the book. Books they remember reading first were topped by Dr. Seuss and particularly THE CAT IN THE HAT and GREEN EGGS AND HAM. Those are not surprising selections with their aural appeal, something most children would enjoy, but especially in the Black sector in which the oral tradition has been integral for so long. Other selections include stories like LITTLE TRAIN THAT COULD, JUNGLE BOOK, RAMONA, Dick and Jane stories, and BAMBI--stories one would expect to be popular choices for children. The fact that 15 could not remember any children's books may suggest that reading was not very important in their childhood. Of those who remembered no early book, 24% (10) saw themselves fair or poor readers, and only 12% (5) as good. Incidentally, 22% (12) cited a Dr. Seuss book as their
first reading remembrance. Some 15% (6) of the Seuss 
readers saw themselves as good or excellent readers; the 
rest viewed themselves as at least fair readers.

The answer to the question "What do you remember 
reading since starting 9th grade?" elicited a much longer 
list of titles, almost all of which are typically included 
in high school literature curricula. The list included: 
Macbeth, Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, Scarlet 
Letter, The Pearl, A Christmas Carol, Of Mice and Men, 
David Copperfield, The Color Purple, Black Boy, Raisin in 
the Sun, Donald Goins, Roots, Marian Anderson, A Wrinkle 
in Time, the Hardy boys, Farenheit 451, Forever, and 
Watership Down. The fact that all but four or five titles 
represent assigned reading in school may indicate a lack 
of reading as an elected activity. What also made them 
memorable to students may have been the story as presented 
by the teacher more than total reading of the text, in 
keeping with the oral tradition of the Black culture. 
Only five books would fall into the category of Black 
literature, indicating either little interest in the 
literature or its failure to make an impression on 
students. Particularly noteworthy is that over 25% (11 
out of 41) could not remember a single book since starting 
9th grade. For a significant segment, reading is of 
minimal importance.
Students were also asked to assess their reading skill—speed, comprehension, overall ability. In regard to reading speed, 17% (7) saw themselves as slow readers, 70% as average readers (29), and only 12% (5) considered themselves fast readers. Their assessment of comprehension rate was one as poor, 51% (21) as fair, 32% (13) as good, and 15% (6) as excellent. Overall reading ability revealed 5% (2) seeing themselves as poor readers, 46% (19) as fair, 39% (16) as good and only 10% (4) considered themselves excellent readers. Most of these students’ evaluations are relative to their peer groups who, for most, have been Black also. Reading scores show 50-60% of each new class reading below 11th grade high school level, many reading much lower than 11th grade.

For pleasure reading most students preferred shorter selections with 34% (14) opting for short stories and 37% (15) choosing magazines. Since so few considered themselves strong readers, it follows that shorter, manageable readings would be picked. For the “realists,” nearly 20% preferred non-fiction or biographies; 29% (12) enjoyed reading novels for pleasure reading.

While students had preferences for types of literature they would read, most of them had read an average of fewer than two books per year over a period of at least five years. Disclosing how many complete books they had read
since starting 9th grade, 17% (7) said 7-9 books; 29% (12) had completed 4-6 titles; 22% (9) had completed 1-3 works; and one wrote that he had never read a complete book.

The last question asked them to pick the word that described their attitude toward reading. 7% (3) marked "Hate" as their attitude while 15% (6) characterized their attitude as "Enthusiastic." Then 34% (14) looked at reading just as a "Necessity," and 10% (4) saw it as something to be "Tolerated." The other 34% (14) looked at reading as something "Pleasant."

Of the 41 students answering the questionnaire, only 5% (2) performed superior work, each earning a grade of A in Research and Composition. One had graduated from a predominantly white suburban high school adjacent to a large metropolitan school district. The other was a foreign student from Mali, whose native language was French. Both listed several memorable books from high school. The American student had read more than ten books which included standard English works (Scarlet Letter, Romeo and Juliet, The Great Gatsby, Great Expectations, Lord of the Flies, Moby Dick, The Odyssey, and "Tell Tale Heart"). [The range of grades for the students surveyed was 2 A's, 8 B's, 21 C's, 6 D's, and 4 F's.]

The West African student listed several French titles as memorable and had read more than 10 books; she had also
been schooled in standard English instruction. While the spoken was sometimes rather difficult to understand, the composition language was eloquent. The six sources she examined for her research paper on Harriet Tubman were written in English, yet her understanding of the material was thorough.

One other consideration from the students' responses to the questions, which should be mentioned, is the tendency for these students to look at their skills "optimistically." Each year entering freshmen are surveyed to get a profile of the class and their assessment of their preparation for college. Year after year the survey suggests a student population that considers itself well-prepared for college; however, the school's analysis reveals something different in the results of placement tests.

The composition exercise asked students to explain why they liked or disliked reading. While a questionnaire permits a quick response, an essay requires thinking, organizing, and developing ideas. What follows are a number of reasons cited by the students explaining their positive and negative attitudes toward reading. Of the 36 compositions submitted, there was almost an even division
with 16 telling why they did not like to read and 18 discussing why they liked to read. The other two discussed both sides of the question.

Those who did not like to read cited reasons stemming from lack of interest in the subject matter, poor skills, and inadequate time and place. One student who does not like to read wrote "...textbooks should be banned...because [they] have no stimulation whatsoever." Another labeled textbooks a "cop-out" for instructors devoid of enough knowledge to teach on their own. All in all students are forced to read too much that doesn’t interest them. Another comment was "I long to read about Black people. I get sick and tired of having to read about Black people that are slaves, servants, ‘Uncle Tom’s’ or about the ones that shuffle. Reading about positive Blacks that didn’t have to ask the ‘white’ man to give it to him are the ones I want to read about. Although some ‘would rather watch TV than pick up a book,’ many simply lack skills to be competent readers.

Vocabulary deficit is one area of concern. Inability to read well aloud resulted in ridicule in the early years and subsequent anxiety about the entire reading experience. One football player who is probably headed for a professional career in the NFL wrote, "I didn’t read when I was a kid because I could not read. I was afraid
of reading all because I don't know many words, and many words for me was[sic] very difficult to sound out or pronounce." Another sad commentary is that he thought he could read. "My classmates would make fun of me. I became afraid of trying. I would pretend that I was asleep or even sick just so I wouldn't have to read." Then he chose other activities so he didn't have to deal with the embarrassment.

Furthermore, necessary time and place keep creeping into the scene. So much time is needed for assigned reading, that there is never any time for pleasure reading. Absence of time as well as no consistently quiet area on the campus as a setting are further obstacles to pleasure reading.

In contrast to these negative viewpoints, a little more than half wrote taking positive positions on reading, viewing it as an escape from daily stress and pressure, a vehicle to learn new ideas and information, and an instrument for understanding and gaining insights into self.

One wrote that when she was taught how to improve reading and writing skills by a college instructor, her speed and comprehension increased: "I was able to understand what I was reading about; also I felt better about myself." Others wrote "...the whole key to
reading right, to learn." "I like to read because it builds my reading and comprehension skills to...comprehend and understand more philosophical ideas of writers." Then, "reading constitutes the major element of a successful life."

One student had done a type of self-analysis and undergone a conversion. "...I don't like to read. I don't like to read because I read slow. It takes me to [sic] long to read a book. I could read more often than I should because as I was writing this paper I came up with a solution for two of my excuses. For my first excuse I could read during the summer, and the other excuse about the books aren't interesting enough, I could find the books that interest me. After writing this essay, I realized that I could read more if I would just try."

The West African student wrote in the introduction to her paper: "In this world, we have always said that the best way to 'keep' things, to memorize, to show, to explain and to prove things is by writing them. Ancient people, especially African people who did not write anything about their life, about their period, are now considered without past, without history. But, if there is a writing, there should be a reading too. A writing which is not read does not mean anything. So, the main important thing is not to write, but to read."
This sampling may confirm the value of reading in molding effective communicators, both in written and oral expression. Those with extensive reading backgrounds and with better than average reading ability plus a positive attitude toward this discipline are the masters of Standard American English and again the individuals empowered by language.
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