

Fishbowl Colonialism: The White Colonial Gaze on the Sound of Black America in Education

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Abstract

To counter anti-Black racism in the current post-civil rights movement era and to serve the needs of African American students whose cultural experiences have been historically marginalized in U.S. education (Mustaffa, 2017), schools and school systems should strive to provide culturally responsive and sustaining curricula (Paris & Alim, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). However, when attempts have been made to practice cultural responsiveness in English language arts and music education, the result has been an alarming and emotionally charged public backlash (Smitherman, 2006). This article explains this backlash and the resistance to Black sound culture in the classroom by exploring the colonial gaze (Kaplan, 1997) on the Black auditory body. I call this phenomenon “fishbowl colonialism,” which describes how Black American music and language are exploited for entertainment but historically have not been considered worthy of serious study or inclusion in formal education. My aim in this essay is to historicize the stigmatization and subalternity of Black sound culture (Keyes, 2003) and to analyze how this stigma hinders efforts to provide culturally responsive education for African American students. If those who shape educational policy and curricula understand how the fishbowl colonialism of Black sound culture influences education policies, African American language (AAL) and music can be reframed in the classroom as a culturally responsive practice that centers on the culture of Black students.

Keywords: colonialism, Black sound culture, culturally responsive education, African American language, Black music

Introduction

African Americans have been subjected to the Euro-American colonial gaze since 1619 when they were first forced into what would become the United States. The imperial gaze refers to the way the colonial agenda seeks to maintain and legitimize power by determining social realities, including the dehumanization of its subjects and the perpetual separation of Us (the so-called civilized colonizers) from the Other (the colonized) (Quijana, 2000). The white colonial gaze imposed on enslaved Africans took on many forms to ensure continued profits from the enslavement of Black people. This included viewing them as objects, not people, who did their labor and provided their pleasure. The European colonial gaze cast African Americans by law as chattel, therefore non-persons. In the U.S. Constitution, enslaved African Americans were counted as three-fifths of a human being, and were subjected to the colonial gaze of the 19th-century racist pseudo-sciences of craniometrics and psychometrics, as well as extreme sexual objectification and usury (Branche, 2015; Morgan, 2004). In *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body*, Harvey Young (2010) comments that “Black bodies, both male and female . . . live[d] an objectified existence within the Western world . . . [and] in the twenty-first century, continue to share in the experiences of their ancestors who were viewed as ‘other,’ unjustly incarcerated, and subjected to limitless violence” (p. 4). This violence was and is not only physical but psychological and emotional. The colonial gaze was cast not only upon the visible Black body, as scholars including Nancy Hewitt (2002) have often noted, but it has also been applied consistently to the auditory Black body and has ruthlessly violated Black culture.

One aspect of the auditory Black body was Black speech, which included language patterns and the message of words spoken, especially words about seeking freedom, which has been closely monitored from the time of slavery to the FBI Cointelpro (Counterintelligence program) surveil-

lance that destroyed Black leaders during the civil rights and Black Power movements. Auditory surveillance was imposed on African Americans during slavery to such an extent that Black folks developed coded methods of communication, including the double entendre used in spirituals. Formerly enslaved African Americans described having to quiet the prayers and songs they uttered in secret gatherings, called hush harbors, to avoid detection by the patrollers who roved Southern roads (Vol. 3 Florida: 212; Vol. 15 Tennessee: 49; Vol. 16 Texas, Part 1: 199; Levine 2007, p. 42). It is also widely documented that the FBI launched the Cointelpro operation to monitor the words of African American freedom fighters such as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Blackstock, 1975). The colonial gaze on the auditory Black body initiated a historical process that has stigmatized Black sounds, especially African American Language (AAL) and African American music. This gaze on Black sound culture has had a direct effect on the education provided to Black children.

Geneva Smitherman (2006, p. 3) defines AAL as “a style of speaking English words with . . . Africanized semantic, grammatical, pronunciation and rhetorical patterns.” Enslaved Africans developed and spoke creole languages that were a mix of African languages and English, which the European colonists labeled “bad English.” In 1774, Edward Long, a British-born colonial apologist and member of the slave-owning planter elite in Jamaica, echoed the Euro-colonial view of Black language with these words:

The Africans speak their respective dialects, with some mixture of broken English. The language of the Creoles is bad English, larded with the Guiney dialect, owing to their adopting the African words, in order to make themselves understood by the imported slaves . . . The better sort are very fond of improving their language, by catching at any hard word that the whites happen to let fall in their hearing; and they alter and misapply it in a strange manner. (2002, pp. 426-427)

Along with the rest of enslaved Africans’ cultures, their language was considered inferior by Europeans. Regarding music, Radono and Bohlman (2000, p. 16) report that through the European slave trade and colonial project, Europeans “othered” groups and associated music with these groups by casting them as ‘savage’ and ‘uncivilized.’ With the rise of social Darwinism, which Europeans used to rationalize colonial exploitation, “foreign musics,” or non-European music, was given a “decidedly inferior status” (p. 16). The idea of European supremacy was codified by the German musicological canon (Bach, Beethoven, etc.), which in the United States was linked with whiteness. Radono and Bohlman also discuss American minstrelsy, which the Irish initiated in the mid-1800s to emphasize racial difference and to project ideas of Black inferiority. In short, ideas about Black music were used to connote racial differences between American whites and Blacks, and the idea of Black inferiority.

One current byproduct of stigmatized Black language is the emotionally charged resistance to using AAL to teach students who speak it to read and speak Standard American English. In 1996, when the Oakland school board passed a resolution that recognized AAL, or Ebonics, as a non-English language to be used to transition its speakers to Standard American English, there was an uproar and resistance from the Black leadership class, such as Maya Angelou and Jesse Jackson (Smitherman, 2006, p. 130). Bill Cosby, extraordinary cultural contributions aside, also was “vociferously oppositional” (p. 8) to the Oakland Ebonics solution. Anna Fay Vaughn-Cooke, a linguist who conducted seminal studies on the language acquisition of African American children, was antagonized by a white interviewer on CNN, who insisted on referring to AAL as “bad English” (Garcia, 2014). During a 1997 news debate on the Oakland Ebonics controversy, Kweisi Mfume, then president of the NAACP, condescendingly said that Ebonics or AAL speakers need to find ways to “bridge out of that into proper English and proper communicative skills” (Garcia, 2014). The hierarchical language continuum, which Edward Long wrote of in 1774 and was codified over the centuries, resounded in the public outcry against Oakland’s Ebonics resolution.

Although all American popular music is essentially Black music (Maultsby, 2015), it has been stigmatized in the mainstream as illegitimate and is not taught in most American music education programs. Of course, stakeholders and decision-makers of music education programs would not officially announce that Black music is not included because they believe that it is inferior to

European-derived traditions. During a 1968 appearance on the *Dick Cavett Show*, James Baldwin made a profound statement that explains how to recognize institutional racism:

I don't know how most White people in this country feel. But I can only conclude how they feel by the state of their institutions. I don't know if the labor unions and their bosses really hate me, that doesn't matter, but I know that I am not in their unions. I don't know if the real estate lobbyists have anything against Black people, but I know the real estate lobbyists keep me in the ghetto. *I don't know if the board of education hates Black people, but I know the textbooks they give my children to read and the schools where we have to go to.* Now...this is the evidence. (emphasis added)

A Eurocentric approach to music-making and teaching is reflected in the 2014 National Association of Music Education standards, which have been adopted by most states; New York State and Washington D.C., have also adopted the National Core Arts Standards (Schuler et al., 2014, pp. 41-49). These standards reflect the Eurocentric curricula U.S. music educators are expected to deliver. Even the images they include in these standards, of students playing in European orchestras, reflect the expectation that their music education programs will teach students how to perform the European classical canon (Cunningham, 2019). The fact that Black music is not often centered in school systems' music education standards like the District of Columbia Public School system that serves a large majority of African American children, reflects the continued effect the Euro-American colonial legacy has on the Black auditory body. As a result, African American students and their sound culture continue to be marginalized in public education.

Both historic and contemporary iterations of the colonial gaze on the auditory Black body create the effect that I call "fishbowl colonialism"—by which I mean that eyes and ears are on Black sound culture to exploit it for its entertainment value but not to consider it worth including in formal educational programs. My aim with this article is to historicize the stigmatization of Black sound culture and to analyze how this stigma hinders the provision of culturally responsive education for African American students.

The Historical Colonial Fishbowl: Misperceptions and Surveillance of the Black Auditory Body

As stated earlier, one aspect of the colonial gaze was slave owners and their agents' surveillance of the auditory Black body—that is, the sounds and speech of enslaved Blacks. The white listeners surveilled communications between enslaved Blacks in an effort to detect escape plans or resistance of any kind. Their tyranny led enslaved African Americans to develop an audible "hidden transcript," (Scott, 1990), a covert form of communication that included songs that signaled escape, like "Steal Away" or "Bound for the Promised Land," which Harriet Tubman sang to let her sister know she was running away (Larson, 2004). The hush harbor tradition established a cultural structure that allowed open speech to occur only in closed cultural spaces that were not surveilled by slave owners or their proxies who might be listening (Cade, 1935; Cornelius, 1999; Ford, 2015).

The auditory colonial gaze was used to argue for Black inferiority because African Americans' language and music differed from that of Europeans. No document makes this plainer than Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), an entire section of which is devoted to Jefferson's pseudo-scientific analysis of Africans' differences and assumed inferiority. He wrote, "In music they [Blacks] are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time . . . [However,] whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of, complicated harmony, is yet to be proved" (p. 147). Jefferson was not the only colonial agent to denigrate Black sound. Linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949, p. 5) reveals that early white linguists regarded Gullah, the language widely spoken by Blacks living on the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia, as "partly a survival of baby-talk which the white people, during the early period of slavery, found it necessary to use in communicating with the slaves." The colonial gaze was also imposed on Black music by outlawing the use of certain instruments; drumming, for example, was outlawed in most states because it was associated with slave rebellions (Radano & Bohlman, 2000, p. 464). European perceptions of enslaved African Americans' vocal music were also deni-

grating. African Americanist musicologist Eileen Southern documents that the African voice was described as a “‘rud noyse,’ ‘a strong nasal sound,’ or ‘very loud and shrill’” (cited in Griffin, 2004, p. 106). She further notes that “in these descriptions Black voices are other and foreign. The Black voice is part of the Black body; the Black body was deemed the very antithesis of all that was white and therefore human” (p. 106). The white colonial gaze regarded every aspect of the Black auditory body as inferior.

The Colonial Fishbowl in Modernity

European colonization of Black subjects has taken many forms throughout the Western Hemisphere and in Africa, though the methods of colonialism differ by country and region (Potthast-Jutkeit, 1997; Ndaliko, 2016). In some countries, like the United States and South Africa, settler or external colonialism was the primary mode of oppression, starting in the 1600s. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 4). Ghana provides an example of external colonialism. Ruling from a distance, Britain installed a British governor and exploited the colony’s resources, such as gold and cocoa, using the indigenous population as cheap labor. They manipulated compliance with this system through an education system that taught Ghanaian children to identify with British culture. External colonialism was enforced all over Africa by France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and other European nations (Rodney, 1981). While many of these colonial techniques were used against Africans in America, including historically exploiting them for cheap labor and colonial education, the oppression differs because the United States is a settler colony. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012, p. 5) give a salient definition of the way settler and internal colonialism operates in the United States:

The other form of colonialism that is attended to by postcolonial theories and theories of coloniality is internal colonialism, the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora, and fauna within the “domestic” borders of the imperial nation. This involves the use of particularized modes of control—prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing—to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite. These modes of control, imprisonment, and involuntary transport of the human beings across borders—ghettos, their policing, their economic divestiture, and their dislocatability—are at work to authorize the metropole and conscribe her periphery. Strategies of internal colonialism, such as segregation, divestment, surveillance, and criminalization, are both structural and interpersonal.

I expand on Tuck and Yang’s analysis by considering the particular kind of colonialism Blacks have been subjected to in the United States because “settler colonialism operates through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony” (p. 5). The 2010 Census reports that the United States has a majority (60.1%) Euro-descendant population and a comparably small (13.4%) Afro-descendant population, thus it is curious that African American sound culture is so prevalent in U.S. popular culture. This is not by happenstance. Blacks have not been subjected to a distant gaze, but to one that is immediate and inescapably up close—a minority contained by colonial rulers in a ‘fishbowl.’ African American sound culture, particularly music and speech, is highly visible, and it has been exploited by U.S. media, corporations, and white audiences, while at the same time Black Americans remain highly controlled and marginalized through the specific process that I call fishbowl colonialism.

Fishbowl Colonialism through Minstrelsy

A fish in a bowl is on display. The glass magnifies the onlooker’s view of the fish, but the fish in its container does not have the same magnified view as its audience. This reflects African Americans’ experience of colonialism in the United States, through white minstrelsy, which demeaned and mocked Black speech and music. Minstrelsy, which emerged in the 1830s, was the first popular American entertainment. White minstrel performers, both men, and women, performed what they viewed as Black difference and inferiority to whites (Lott, 1992; Wynter, 1979; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2019). They performed in blackface, with exaggerated white or red lips, and wore wigs resembling Black hair, all to mock Blacks’ phenotypical

differences from whites and to portray Black features as ugly. These degrading performances extended to African American traditions, their foodways, and dance, and especially, Black sound: African American instruments, singing styles, and speech (Lott, 1992; Arceneaux, 2005: p. 65). White minstrels developed their performances by watching and listening to Black Americans. Those they ensnared in their colonial fishbowl were often servants or African Americans in subordinate positions. Lott (1992) describes the colonial gaze of white male blackface minstrels who rose to fame in the 1800s:

T. D. Rice used an old black stableman's song and dance in his first "Jump Jim Crow" act. Dan Emmett . . . learned to pat the infantry drum from a man nicknamed "Juba" Appearing as a banjo player in various circuses, Emmett very soon teamed up with the dancer Frank Bower, who had learned his dances directly from black men . . . Stephen Foster no doubt had contact with black wharf workers and boatmen in his hometown of Pittsburgh, but according to his brother, he experienced black church singing firsthand through a family servant, Olivia Pise, who was a "member of a church of shouting colored people."

In this example of fishbowl colonialism, Rice, Emmet, and Foster demeaned Black music and danced with their strange compulsion to imitate it. The fact that these imitations made the entertainment careers of these white men demonstrates their power over the Black people that they mimicked, and how their misinterpretation of Black sound culture stigmatized it publicly.

James Weldon Johnson (1912) offers an example of fishbowl colonialism in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. He describes a club in the early 20th century where Black singers, instrumentalists, dancers, and actors often performed. Unfortunately, the club served as a colonial fishbowl for whites, as Johnson explains:

Almost every night one or two parties of white people [visited the club], men and women who were out sight-seeing, or slumming. They generally came in cabs; some of them would stay only for a few minutes, while others sometimes stayed until morning. There was also another set of white people who came frequently; it was made up of a variety performers and others who delineated "darky characters"; they came to get their imitations firsthand from the Negro entertainers they saw there. (p. 51)

T. D. Rice and the performers who played "darky" characters had the power to misrepresent Black people and their culture on the public stage, and later in film. These misrepresentations concretized a demeaning view of Black speech and music in the dominant culture.

Blackface minstrel performances later appeared on radio, film, and even television. Through minstrelsy, Black language came to signify to the white mainstream a lack of intelligence, just as Black music, as Jefferson asserted, represented a culture that was inferior to whites. The demeaning of Black music and speech is exemplified in the popular blackface minstrel radio programs, which rose to popularity in the 1920s. Arceneaux (2005) documents that minstrel shows were present from the earliest years of radio broadcasting. A stereotyped "black dialect" which was referred to as "blackface talk" or "racial ventriloquism" (p. 63) was used to connote the visual image of blackface performers; parodied Black speech was used to depict negative stereotypes of African Americans: "To white audiences, African Americans were perceived as simple and unsophisticated . . . this perception of Black culture was wrapped up in stereotypes" of Blacks as lazy and uneducated (p. 65). Minstrel radio actors codified these ideas through a specific kind of comic performance. Using parodies or stereotypes of AAL, minstrel actors, performing as Black stereotypes, would mock women (Black women), marriage, and joke about "stealing chickens, gambling and drinking." After this, they would deliver a "serious talk riddled with mispronounced words" (p. 65). Two episodes of the *Jack Benny Show*, in 1936 and 1942, concluded with a "blackface parody of Romeo and Juliet" (p. 65). This form of minstrelsy linked ideas of Black inferiority with Black speech, which they stereotyped by deliberately mispronouncing words that did not conform to the grammatical rules of AAL.

Black music was similarly denigrated. The banjo, which derived from West African culture, was played widely by Black Americans (Linford, 2014), but was “first popularized by 19th-century blackface acts” (Arceneaux, 2005, p. 63). White minstrels on the radio played the banjo to reinforce negative Black stereotypes. A radio series called *Plantation Nights* was “based around spirituals and gospel songs” that harkened back to the “earliest days of minstrel shows” (p. 63). The show was promoted as re-creating an “old southern plantation where the darkies come to serenade the owner” (p. 63). The long-running *Aunt Jemima* series, the “quintessential version of the mammy stereotype . . . featured traditional minstrel songs and blackface dialect” (p. 64) that the white minstrels ridiculed.

Even more disturbing is how blackface minstrelsy had a multi-generational influence. The initial primary audience was older white men (Arceneaux, 2005: p. 63) but expanded to include white males and females of all ages: “Blackface entertainment was not only seen as non-offensive but as wholesome and acceptable for all ages. ‘I believe there is no finer, cleaner humor than that contained in the old-time minstrel shows,’ wrote Dailey Paskman [radio program director of the 1920s] (1927)” (p. 67). Perceptions of Black inferiority vis-à-vis stigmatized Black sound culture was calcified in the minds of whites, young and old alike, by engaging in these minstrel performances. These audiences gazed upon misrepresentations of Black culture in the colonial fishbowl of radio and every other area of American society. As documented by the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia of Ferris State University, minstrel images of Black America permeated every part of American society. The stigmatizing message about Black people and their culture, even though it was misrepresented, became a part of United States popular culture. Arceneaux argues that “by the 1920s, minstrelsy had already influenced so many aspects of popular culture that it began to fade into the background; its influence defied precise definition” (p. 68). This was hegemonic societal structuring at work. Degrading images of Black Americans, which were particularly defined by the ridicule of African American vernacular language and music, were pervasive and present in all visual media, including advertisements, sheet music, postcards, product packaging, household objects, and of course, radio, film, and television. The degradation of Black people and Black culture defined United States society, and African Americans had little power to fight against it and stop it. African Americans were inescapably caught in U.S. popular cultures’ colonial fishbowl and subject to the white American gaze. Speaking as an African American, I do not know how my forebears could stand it and maintain positive cultural esteem. In many cases, they could not, as we will examine later.

These depictions contributed to the hegemonic structuring of American society whereby European American culture was seen by the American public as “high,” and African Americans (and Africans) and their culture were seen as “low.” Even more specifically Black sound culture, through “blackface dialect” and stereotyped performances of African American music, was placed in a low-status category in comparison with Standard American English (and perhaps also British English) and European classical music and literature, which were upheld as hallmarks of intelligence and sophistication. This is evident in American societal structures. European music forms, like the European classical music canon, were presented in formal venues like symphony halls, state-funded arts platforms, and theaters (Struble 1995). These structures formed an economy for instruction in Western music that would be applied by students who became professional performers of the Western classical tradition. In the same way, the commercial forums that presented minstrel representations of Black sound culture also formed a supply and demand economy for such performances. This is why Black performers who wanted professional work were forced to wear blackface and perform minstrelsy. The economy for true forms of African American music performed by African American musicians, like gospel music, for instance, was much smaller and primarily located within African American communities. While a more in-depth analysis of this is beyond the scope of this paper, my point is this: societal hierarchies that exalted European sounds, music, and speech and degraded African American music and speech dictated what has been historically viewed as accepted and proper in formal education settings.

While it is impossible to review the curriculum of every school system, one only needs to look at the National Core Arts Standards concerning music, and how they are represented in the following

and derivative documents to understand the value placed in formal education on European classical music. The National Core Arts Standards primarily emphasize mastery of Eurocentric “music proficiency” skills at the primary level in preparation for orchestral ensembles at the secondary level (www.nationalartsstandards.org). These values are also reflected in the so-called “Mozart effect” (Swaminathan, Nikhil, 2007) that has driven the cottage industry of books, CDs, and videos like “Beethoven for Babies: Brain Training for Little Ones,” which claim that early exposure to the European Classical canon makes children smarter and contributes to their brain development. Other than a recent and highly problematic study by Dr. Jessica Phillips-Silver, on how polyrhythms of African American gogo music, a funk style, can accelerate brain development (Lefrak, 2020), little attention has been given to exploring the “brain development” effects of African American music or other cultural traditions. Hegemonic societal hierarchies explain where these elements of Black culture, especially Black speech and music, are placed (or rather excluded) in formal classroom settings, and why discussions of including them in curricula for Black students provoke such a strong reaction from the public.

The Effects of the Colonial Fishbowl on American Education

The fishbowl colonialism targeted at African American culture has deeply shaped public debates and policies concerning the education of Black American children. Let us first focus on the effects of fishbowl colonialism on English Language Arts educational policies for Black children through the lens of the 1996 Ebonics controversy. The Oakland school board passed the “Ebonics resolution” in an effort to correct the lower reading and language arts scores, and grade scores of their African American students. The resolution stated the following: “standardized tests and grade scores will be remedied by the application of a program with teachers and aides who are certified in the methodology of featuring African Language Systems principles in instructing African-American children...” The resolution ignited a national controversy that culminated in a United States Senate hearing because it cited Ebonics as a non-English language spoken by a large number of the district’s African American students, and resolved to train their educators to teach students Standard American English as a second language using AAL. The backlash was against recognizing AAL as a valid language, or language system. This backlash was wholly informed by the minstrelizing of the language. In the end, the school board was not able to do as it wanted, regardless of the linguistic experts who advocated for their approach.

One of these linguists was Dr. Ernest A. Smith (1975), who played a significant role in shaping the Ebonics resolution. He defines African American Language (AAL) as West/Central African Niger-Congo grammatical patterns, combined with English vocabulary (Smith, 1975, pp 77-85 and 1998). The term “Ebonics” was coined by psychologist Robert L. Williams (1975). The word is a combination of the word ‘ebony,’ meaning black, and phonics, meaning ‘sounds’ — black sounds. Ebonics is a term that a group of linguists, led by Dr. Williams, used to define all Africanized languages of the Western Hemispheric African Diaspora, including “the various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of Black people” (Williams, 1975, p. vi).

The term *U.S. Ebonics* refers specifically to the language variety spoken by persons of African descent in the United States (Alim, H. S., & Baugh, J., 2007, p. 35). Dr. Smith (1975, 1998) argues that the difference between *U.S. Ebonics*, AAL, or AAVE (African American Vernacular English), or all other derivative names for Black American speech, and Standard American English is the African influence—an African influence that the Oakland school board wanted their teachers to consider when teaching their Black students English Language Arts. Tracing back at least fifty years of linguistic study, Smith shows Ebonics’ basis in West African languages (“A Lesson in Ebonics” 1997). Dr. Smith states that human beings learn the language in the environment in which it is spoken and heard. To the extent where Black people have been living in social isolation, Black sounds are a linguistic continuation of Africa. This is the foundation to understanding AAL—it not only journeys back to the time when Africans first came into the country through slavery, but it also speaks to isolated African American language communities in the contemporary. Smith cites the Gullah/Geechee communities of Coastal South Carolina and Georgia as an example of an isolated language community.

Building on Smith's conclusions, I further contend that isolated speech communities that speak specific varieties of African American English exist in areas where there are high, single ethnic group concentrations of African-Americans (Bailey and Maynor, 1987), like the Marshall Heights section of South East Washington D.C. where I taught for many years. Thus, in the case of an AAL speaker in an isolated language community on Hilton Head Island in 1820, on a Delta, Mississippi plantation in 1908, in the Harlem section of New York City in 1930, in Brownsville, Chicago in 1950, or in Marshall Heights, Washington D.C. in 2020, Smith argues that whenever the speaker of one language (an African language like Wolof or AAL) attempts to speak a target language that is structurally different from his own, (Standard American English) there is a tendency of the mother tongue to interfere with "intrusions." These are also called "interference modifications" or "transfer phenomena." The mother tongue interferes and modifies the target language where it is structurally different, phonetically, morphologically, and syntactically (Elesije, 2015). Dr. Smith discusses these structural differences in depth. He says that African Niger-Congo language groups, from which AAL is derived, have a "consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel" phonetical pattern ("A Lesson in Ebonics," 1997). He also says that West African languages do not have consonant cluster configurations. For instance, the -st consonant cluster is not present. Therefore, "west, best, test and fast become wes', bes', tes' and fas'." Likewise, the -ld consonant cluster is not present. Therefore, in AAL, "cold and hold become col' and hol'." He also makes the point that some languages, like Arabic and West African languages, do not have the verb "to be," which is the auxiliary or copula verb (Elesije, 2015 and Vaughn-Cook, 1998). Speakers of these languages morphologically express thoughts using an equative clause, which is formulated as "topic – comment." Dr. Smith explains that the underlying concept of *nomo* explains why the 'to be' auxiliary verb is not present in West African languages. *Nomo* means that when you speak, you bring something into existence. Therefore, an example of common parlance in AAL might be "Where yo' Mama," which exempts the 'to be' copula verb. Or "Yo' Mama, she col'," exhibiting the "topic-comment" West African syntactical structure in AAL, and the absence of the -ld consonant cluster (Elesije, 2015). Although there is an extensive analysis of West African structures in AAL, including many West African language vocabulary retentions documented by linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949), the ones stated above are enough to understand that the "deep structure" of AAL does not follow the English language as its phonetical, syntactical and morphological root.

Dr. Williams and Dr. Smith conducted and published their research in order to "remove the stigma that the language our kids speak is a deficient language" (A Lesson from Ebonics, 1997). Their goal, which is reflected in the language of the Oakland School Board's Ebonics Resolution, is to ensure that the "70 percent to 90 percent of African American children who speak Ebonics" be taught that the language they speak is a "legitimate linguistic heritage instead of being placed in remedial English classes" (1997). They argue that for schools not to do so is "discrimination against African American children" (1997). I agree. The Oakland School Board, Smith, Williams, and other linguists like Dr. Anna Faye Vaughn-Cook (1998) were all pushing against a stigma that had long been placed on AAL, from slavery to minstrelsy through fishbowl colonialism.

The raging backlash against the Oakland resolution was a consequence of the way Black speech had been historically stigmatized. "Blackface talk" mocked, misrepresented, and defamed the morphology, syntax, and lexicon of AAL that the school board intended to use to bridge their students to speaking and reading Standard American English, which is often referred to as the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) (Smitherman, 2006 p. 6). The very West African "transference phenomenon" that Dr. Smith discusses had come to be used as a comic relief that signified negative African American stereotypes to the point where Black speech indexes to many as Black intellectual inferiority (Elesije, 2015). Such significations were intentionally constructed, written into radio and film scripts, and have been extremely damaging. The content of the most popular, longest-running, and influential minstrel radio show (turned television show) Amos and Andy demonstrate just why many ridiculed the concept of Ebonics as a valid language system worthy to be used in formal classroom instruction (Arceneaux, 2005, p. 6).

From my own survey of the *Amos and Andy* radio show, which ran from 1928 to 1960, I learned that the stories took place in Harlem, an area of New York known for its high African American population. It always featured Amos, Andy, and another character named Kingfish engaging in foolish, ill-thought-out, and unintelligent activities. Always. Their foolish doings were linked to the parodied AAL that they spoke. The white minstrel actors who played these characters, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, most prominently emphasized in their spoof of AAL either the absence of the ‘to be’ auxiliary or copula verb or the varied uses of it, like “I is,” “It’s” or “ain’t.” They also featured the West African phonetical pronunciations—the absence of the ‘r’ at the end of words like ‘your’ and ‘sure’ pronounced as ‘yo’ and ‘sho’. Also, all characters pronounced words like cold, that, and fast as col’ ‘dat, and fas’.

Aside from the *Amos and Andy* show, other examples are numerous, including the “Jim Crow” character and scene in the 1941 Disney film *Dumbo*, *The Gold Dust Twins*, *Sinclair Weiner Minstrels*, *Jack Benny Radio Show*, and *The Jazz Singer* film with Al Jolson’s grossly offensive blackface minstrel performance. These media outlets cemented minstrel parodies of Black speech as an unfortunate standard in American humor. The Africanness of Black speech that has been mocked by minstrel performers has resulted in many in the Black professional class who distance themselves from AAL because, to the white mainstream, it signifies Black inferiority and unintelligence. Some Blacks in the leadership class, like Bill Cosby, have openly declared disdain for African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and its speakers (Smitherman, 2006, p. 8). However, most Black professionals distance themselves from AAL, and negative associations with Black language by simply speaking only Standard American English or intentionally code-switching to only speak AAL at home or informal settings, and speaking Standard American English in integrated or predominantly white workplace environments (Young, 2014 and Myers, 2020).

Educational Policies Against African American Language

The stigmatization of Black speech explains the resistance to the efforts to use AAL in instruction before the Ebonics controversy. Even when successful Black linguistic programs were created, they were quickly dissolved. An example of anti-Black resistance to Black language in urban school settings manifested in the SEEK program. The SEEK program (Search for Elevation, Education and Knowledge) was designed in 1971 by linguist-educator Carol Reed and her colleagues who were a part of the Language Curriculum Research Group at Brooklyn College in New York. They launched SEEK to teach students writing skills by contrasting the differences between the students’ AAL and the language required for college writing (Smitherman, 2006, p. 6). Smitherman asserts that SEEK was “the most creative and educationally sound language education program for AAL speaking college students that has ever been developed” (p. 6). Unfortunately, the program, although highly successful with New York Black students, was short-lived because of the backlash against the program by the NAACP, led by Roy Wilkins. *The Crisis*, the NAACP’s news organ, called AAL the “English of the undereducated,” and the program “black nonsense” of “extreme black cultists and their pale spineless sycophants” (p. 6). Their reaction is the result of the fishbowl colonial historically imposed upon Blacks because they accepted the idea reinforced for years by minstrel stereotypes that Black language is inferior to Standard American English. Several years after this, in 1977, three mothers of AAL-speaking students filed a lawsuit that is commonly known as the “Black English case” or the *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children, et al., v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, 1979. The Ann Arbor School district was proven to be guilty of language discrimination against the students. Teachers had labeled the Black students in the case as learning disabled i.e. intellectually inferior because they spoke AAL. The operations of colonial fishbowl once again.

The emotionally charged reaction of many white politicians, news reporters, and Black community leaders to the Oakland Ebonics controversy, that erupted almost twenty years after the “Black English case,” can only be explained by the historical stigmatization of Black speech. Most reacted by issuing several charged and blatantly disrespectful statements about AAL or Ebonics during the 1997 Ebonics and Education Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearings,

or in heated public statements, news program debates, and condescending news articles written by white journalists. Several testifiers at the Senate hearings demonstrated especially disrespectful attitudes and negative emotions towards AAL. Given the history of certain white men who ridiculed Black speech for the entertainment of white audiences, it is no surprise that Senator Lauch Faircloth demonstrated his language prejudice towards African Americans and AAL during the Ebonics Senate hearings by loudly calling Ebonics “absurd” and the Oakland resolution “political correctness that has simply gone out of control” (CSPAN, 1997). Equally disturbing were statements given by two Black American community leaders during the 1997 Ebonics Senate hearings. Rev. Amos Brown, Civil Rights Chairman of the National Baptist Convention, announced that the organization’s board of directors “unanimously voted not to support the concept of Ebonics.” Armstrong Williams, a Black conservative journalist and media personality, called the Oakland resolution a “misguided approach to education.” The impassioned statements from both men were marked with high-volumed speech at certain points and animated gestures to the point where Rev. Brown spoke in an almost sonorous sermonic cadence. Both men labeled African American Language as “broken English,” “bad English,” “bent speech,” and “substandard speech.” Williams went as far as to compare AAL or Ebonics to an illness. He also compared using AAL in teaching methods for African American students to “talking down” to students. He pathologized AAL by comparing its use in the classroom to “teaching math by showing the teacher can make mistakes in subtraction and addition” and comparing it to a teacher “smoking marijuana” to relate to teen drug addicts. Both men clearly saw AAL as a cultural deficit that Black children have to overcome, not as a language heritage to be respected, valued, and appreciated. As mentioned earlier, Kweisi Mfume, the president of the NAACP at the time of the Ebonics controversy, expressed that if the Oakland school board had proposed to teach Ebonics, then it would be a “cruel joke” and that AAL speakers must “find ways to bridge out of that into proper English,” implying that AAL is improper and bad (Garcia, 2014). These Black men have internalized the view of Black language as inferior. They are victims of the fishbowl colonialism of minstrelsy and have adopted its gaze on their own heritage, which led them to help to block funding for bi-lingual education for African American students. In my opinion, based on these case studies, and my experience in the classroom, many Black children are still underperforming in the area of English Language Arts because their home language AAL is not included in their curriculum. This issue is still not resolved.

Stigmatization and Educational Exclusion of African American Music

Based on the National Arts Core Standards, African American music has been largely omitted from school curricula in the same way as Black language (www.nationalartsstandards.org). This is not a coincidence since it has been similarly stigmatized. The hegemonic power of white minstrelsy is demonstrated by the fact that de-contextualized blackface minstrel songs, as opposed to actual Black music, were included in music education curricula (Ermolaeva, 2019). Black music also has the same stigma as Black language in formal classroom settings. Minstrelsy, and negative journalistic writing, created a false narrative about Black music that in the public mind, blanketed the true narrative of Black music. While there are many examples to draw from, one particularly illustrates this point. The style of jazz known as be-bop was developed by Black American musicians like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clark, and Max Roach. They were creative geniuses that innovated bebop by drawing from earlier forms of African American jazz and other music styles like the blues. The advent of be-bop was revolutionary. But like other elements of Black culture, it was misrepresented in mainstream American popular culture. The music style and the musicians were parodied in the “Be-Bop” toy from the 1950s, which is featured in the Jim Crow Museum of Ferris State University. The toy depicts a black man in a bright yellow suit, standing on a round platform. The figure performs a tap dance kind of motion when the platform is turned. The name of the toy is printed on a box: “Be-Bop - The Jivin’ Jigger” (Carpenter, 2019, p. 3). Toys like this, along with blackface stereotypes posed in parodied Black dance movements on sheet music of minstrel or “coon songs,” set a precedent for the common view of Black music as invalid, illegitimate, and not worthy of serious study (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture).

From my own experiences as an African American student, longtime music educator, and now ethnomusicologist, I have firsthand knowledge of the way standard American music education promotes European hegemony and marginalizes the African American experience. African American music is an oral tradition (Burnim and Maulsby, 2006). However, the music education programs based on the National Arts Core Standards that I have observed in New York City and Washington D.C. are designed to prepare students to perform in the written Western European Classical tradition. This tradition occupies a hegemonic top place in American society, is robustly supported by state arts budgets, and is given a central place in university music programs and cultural arts institutions throughout the country. The “El Sistema” instructional model out of Venezuela is a program that was developed to teach Venezuelan students European classical orchestral music. Baker (2014) reports that it has been replicated around the world, especially to teach Black and Brown children European classical music. These programs are well funded in the United States, and completely exclude African American musical traditions. Despite the high praise such programs receive, the centering of the European classical tradition and marginalization of African American music damages Black American students.

Deejay Robinson (2018) discusses the damage he experienced as an African American in music education programs, and as a music educator, in the book chapter “Black Keys on a White Piano: A Negro Narrative of Double-consciousness in American Music Education.” He integrates a first-person narrative of his story as a music student in high school and college. Essentially, like many Black folks, Robinson’s first musical experiences were with the gospel music of the southern African American church. Remembering the emotion of his grandmother’s singing in church, he was drawn to formally study music because of his love for gospel. Upon joining the gospel choir, he observed that all of the other student members were also African American. A teacher noticed that he had a strong tenor voice and encouraged him to audition for the chamber choir. This is when he discovered just how marginalized African American music traditions like gospel are in music education programs. When he arrived at the auditions, he was expected to sing in the Western operatic tradition, sight-read Western notation, and sing in various European languages. Because this was an oral tradition that requires a different musical skill set, he was not prepared for the chamber choir audition. As he observed the preparedness and success of his white counterparts, many of whom had been trained from their youth in the written tradition of Western Art music, he began to internalize feelings of racial inferiority. From the chamber choir, he matriculated into a Western-centered undergraduate vocal program, for which he was not prepared. Consequently, he struggled in his course work, especially in ear training and music history courses, which were all centered on the Western art tradition. He struggled with feelings of inferiority and felt stigmatized because he was the only Black student in his program. Robinson used Dubois’ double consciousness theory (1903) as an analytical tool to dissect his experiences. My question is, what if Robinson had an early culturally responsive music education that privileged the orality of his African American music tradition, and that was centered on his cultural experience? Could he have developed a strong “self-consciousness” that would have allowed him to understand the Africanity, and validity, of the African American oral tradition that he was raised in?

Righting the Wrongs: Possible Solutions

Perhaps the solution to the exclusion of African American language and music from schools that serve Black students is to destigmatize both. One way to do that is to teach the history of Black sound culture, the rich traditions of African American music and speech, and the way it has been historically denigrated and marginalized in the United States through fishbowl colonialism. Towards this goal, I advocate creating a culturally responsive pedagogy based on socio-linguistics research, linguistic studies of African American English, and ethnomusicological research in Black music. Also, the work of education scholars like Janice E. Hale will undergird these efforts with her rich body of knowledge on African American learning styles based on Black orality in her work *Unbank the Fire: Visions for the Education of African American Children* (1994). Drawing from Hale, and social science research, the teacher preparatory programs, as well as the professional development workshops set forth to do this work will help to destigmatize Black

sound culture—at least in the minds of educators. In actuality, however, the minds of educators are not at all “least” in this enterprise. They are actually paramount. Equipping educators with the information that destigmatizes these essential foundational elements of African American culture, and holding them accountable to structure their teaching practice using this information will transform those who teach Black children from colonial agents that uphold the status quo to change agents that liberate. Destigmatizing Black sound culture in the classroom setting is an important first step towards establishing culturally responsive educational programs that truly serve and empower Black American children.

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