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Understanding Black Culture Through the Eyes of non-Black POC Communities

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Abstract

For non-Black communities, navigating Blackness can be similar to traversing a playground, with forms of expression and cultural values frequently toyed with and manipulated for the benefit of non-Black people—and to the detriment of Black communities. To understand recurrent themes and modes of Black cultural appropriation, scholarly writing primarily analyzes this dynamic through the relationship between Black and white communities in the United States. These dialogues typically concern cases where a white individual achieves notoriety in the media through adopting Black speech or even identities, which benefit them financially or socially. But in less direct cases of what we might call “identity theft,” it can be difficult to pinpoint what Black culture consists of and to whom, as well as to what, appropriation looks like; Black communities and their values are not monolithic. Yet it appears that despite some ambiguity in defining these cultural attributes, there exists an unspoken understanding that there is an inherent opposition between white and Black communities that cannot allow for a comfortable cultural exchange — according to scholars, and Black individuals who are most reluctant to share their culture.

But what happens when we ask these questions outside of the Black-white binary? Identifying and addressing instances of Black cultural appropriation becomes more difficult when considering other minority communities, in part because they may have similar histories of being “othered” and there is not the same level of systemic domination between these groups. As a result, cases of Black cultural appropriation enacted by non-Black communities of color typically do not attract the same amount of attention or scrutiny in the media and interpersonal conversations. How, then, do non-Black American people of color (POC) engage with Black American culture through language, and to what degree is their comfort level with Black English usage? This paper aims to break down the implications of what Black cultural appropriation by POC would mean in terms of harming Black communities as compared to examples of white appropriation and to explore the differing intersectional positions of the POC that engage with Black culture. By doing this, I establish the differences between how POC appropriation of Black American culture is perceived by Black individuals as opposed to white appropriation. Further, I question whether the same terminology can even be used due to these historic and racially stratified differences.

Key Words: Black Culture, Appropriation, POC Communities, Black Sociology

Section I. Introduction

Understanding Black Culture Through the Eyes of non-Black POC Communities

As I sat down one evening, scrolling through my social media feed, I found myself engrossed in a series of short videos that seemed to dominate my Explore page. It was a wide mix; some videos showed new dance trends, some had cooking recipes, many of them were group’s attempts at completing internet challenges, a few were advertisements for clothing or music — but a significant portion of these videos were personal vlogs or “storytimes”. Many of these vlogs were created by non-Black POC content creators and featured some humorous recount or climactic period of their day that they were able to highlight and exaggerate for the
video. In doing this, the creators would often employ the use of Black English for certain expressions like “girl”, “bip bam boom”, “mind you”, “whole time”, “period”, “she had said”, etc. These expressions would often be accompanied by hand clapping, gestures, and facial expressions to emphasize the importance of what was said. While I admit that these videos were entertaining, I could not shake my sense of confusion and unease about how this way of speaking which I had been accustomed to knowing and code-switching with as a Black person, was being used so readily and joyfully by someone who did not identify as Black. These feelings were heightened as I scrolled through the comments sections of the videos and noticed that I was very much in the minority in terms of the level of scrutiny I was viewing the video with, versus the praise that other viewers had.

I was struck by this stark contrast between the two. It was not just the fact that those non-Black creators were adopting a linguistic style closely associated with Black culture for comedic effect, but rather, it was the overwhelmingly positive reception these videos seemed to garner despite the appropriation of this culturally significant language. I often view videos in which white creators are engaging with their audience in this same manner and their comments sections are consistently flooded with accusations of cultural appropriation and calls for accountability. In both cases, Black English was casually employed for comedic effect, yet the response was markedly different. It was unclear to me why this was the case. Was it such a cut-and-dry phenomenon that white people are inherently in the wrong due to their history of oppressing others, while minoritized communities should receive grace for being on the receiving end? Was the language that was being used not viewed as Black English by the masses, but as an all-encompassing culturally urban way of speaking that they felt should only belong to POC? Was Black cultural appropriation only able to be enacted by white people? My questions were endless and brought me no closer to discovering why Black English was, first, so normalized in its usage by non-Black Americans, and second, what perceptions those audiences had of Black culture and Black English for them to have such drastic views on what is appropriative and what is welcomed.

These questions led me to reflect on the implications of language appropriation and cultural borrowing in this digital age, as there appear to be complex dynamics at play in these spaces where the boundaries between appropriation and appreciation can blur. If left unaddressed, this thin line can leave marginalized communities — Black communities, in this sense — grappling with the possibility of their cultural identities being erased or co-opted. This concern reigns true for institutions beyond the media industry, as well. American institutions including educational, medical, and governmental systems are biased against Black communities by design. This can be shown through the repeal of affirmative action, denial of medication along with the dismissal of Black patients’ pain, as well as the creation of over-militarized environments that statistically target Black individuals to outcast them from society—whether it be through incarceration or death. Black folks in the United States are reproached for their styles of dress, for preferring to speak their native vernacular rather than assimilating to white traditional English, and for their facial expressions, joy, fear, and mere presence. News outlets and other forms of media that are largely dominated by people who view the adherence of Black respectability politics as the correct way for Blackness to exist in the larger society are quick to redirect the blame for this harsh institutional treatment onto the Black victims themselves. This conformist mindset deliberately ignores the role that white supremacy has in perpetuating and justifying this treatment and creates a discourse that invites both scholars and their non-academic counterpoints to stigmatize Blackness in what they view to be its most unpalatable forms.
Most often, this scorn is directed toward Black speech and mannerisms as they can be attributed to a generalized Black culture that directly challenges mainstream colonial order within the United States—resulting in white disdain. In other words, it might appear more plausible to white people to assume that nothing intellectual or respectable lies within Black speech or everyday physical forms of expression; thus posing more of a threat to white established order than, say, DuBoisian sociology or race theory might. The latter examples still point out inequity for Black Americans and scrutinize this unjust treatment inflicted upon them by whites, but their impact on society may appear less threatening than direct oppositional action. Within the context of this paper, white colonial structures and white supremacist values refer to the selfish, controlling, and xenophobic nature that colonial America has infused into the structures that we still currently operate within. These values directly oppose input and contributions from communities that are not white and wealthy, which results in exclusionary treatment and general disregard. With this widespread apparent disdain for Black cultural contributions to mainstream society being highlighted, it is curious to note that so many still wish to replicate aspects of it into their daily lives through Black English.

Non-Black Americans saying a few phrases in Black English might not seem as devastating of a case of Black identity erasure as some of the injustices mentioned above, but it has large implications for how Blackness is viewed and tolerated in the United States. If a significant amount of Americans are knowingly incorporating Black English into their speech but condemning all other forms of Black expression, this shows that there is a certain appeal that Black English has, which causes non-Black individuals to want to utilize it. If, on the off-chance, they are unknowingly incorporating this style of speech into their daily lives, this shows that Black English is not recognized as that—or as having any connection to Black culture for that matter—but is recognized as something more generalizable; popular culture. Popular culture refers to generally accepted ways of speaking and the trends that have become stylized and popularized through social media that promote an air of “coolness” or acceptance into the “in-crowd.” This phenomenon is most often maintained through school institutions for youth to determine among themselves whom they should interact with and how. Popular culture is most often viewed and created by American youth on social media platforms such as Tiktok or Instagram and as a result, is subject to change quite frequently—though many Black scholars have noted that there appears to be one major constant: that Black cultural attributes are a large part of this widespread aesthetic culture. Social media has become a means of propagating Black cultural appropriation and a space for users to easily react to and discuss these instances with one another.

I want to be clear that social media has not created Black cultural appropriation, as people have taken on Black hairstyles, speech, music, and dance styles, as well as aesthetics well before the rise of the digital age. Before social media, though, individuals were forced to interact in physical proximity to one another to learn about what they were doing which allowed for cultural contexts and significance to be better understood. The introduction of social media replaces this need for in-person interaction and allows a certain indifference to be maintained when it comes to digesting information. Due to the ease of sharing access and the subsequent virality that the content can achieve, aspects of Black culture are shown at a much more dispersed level of visibility that invites people who might have never interacted with Black English or Black cultural expressions before beyond social media, to engage with them. Through this form of engagement, it is not clear the levels of familiarity with or understanding of Black English and culture these individuals have when they are reacting to or posting content—but
these videos are similarly made more visible. In other words, digital forms of cultural appropriation are made more visible.

This phenomenon of Black neglect due to whiteness then no longer exists between Black and white groups but invites non-Black communities of color into the conversation as well. All participants of popular culture in the United States find themselves presented with an ease of access to Black culture that they previously did not have before as a result of the growth of social media, as it is disguised as simply that: aspects of popular culture that belong to everyone. This allows for non-Black people to feel more comfortable discussing, using, and claiming actions that are originally attributed to Black culture as there is either a lack of knowledge or a lack of concern for properly accrediting Black individuals for their contributions to this popular culture that is seemingly able to enrich the social lives of others. These instances of appropriation are then harmful to the social establishment of Black communities as the styles and trends they introduce are more valuable than their livelihoods. Much literature within Black sociology has already explored the inherent denigration of Blackness and Black English by white communities but has not delved into the reasonings for why and how non-Black POC feel this same level of proximity to Blackness to be able to incorporate Black English into their normalized speech.

This paper explores what constitutes Black culture to different people who do not identify as Black and analyzes whether or not the use or misuse of those attributes could be considered appropriation by expanding on the complexities of culture and the role that social media plays in this understanding. I focus on the lesser-discussed phenomenon of this possible appropriation of Black culture enacted by communities of color, to expand on the gap in literature in the fields of Black sociology and the sociology of language. Currently, much of the literature asserts that non-Black individuals either utilize Black English to build their social capital within school institutions or is due to a cultural overlap where different ethnic communities have influenced one another in shared geographical spaces. I break down the implications of Black cultural appropriation by POC looks like in terms of harming Black communities through scholar Richard Roger's definitions of “cultural appropriation” and “cultural exploitation” as compared to examples of white appropriation. Through this, I will explore the differing intersectional positions of the POC that engage with Black culture to establish the varying levels of proximity that POC have to Black culture and their understandings of Black culture through including Black English, — and to even question whether the same terminology of “appropriation” can be used due to historic and institutional racial stratification. This research project will address the gap in literature on this subject within sociology, and create an avenue for further exploration in future studies.

**Section II. Methodology**

To do this, I interviewed nine undergraduate college students of color aged 18-25 across the local area. For these in-depth interviews, I asked respondents about their demographic information, including questions about how they would describe their upbringing and methods of self-expression compared to how they choose to interact with the world and social phenomena currently. Most importantly, this interview process uncovered the different ways that “culture” as a broad term can be interpreted by individuals coming from all different backgrounds and observe the connections that they can make between the cultural identities and practices that they have compared to Black culture and language. Over half of the respondents identified as Latinx, with a mix of identities spanning across South and Central America. The four remaining respondents identified as Asian, three being South-East Asian and one being East Asian. All
respondents live in geographically urban areas among others who primarily make up their specific communities, and most of the Latinx respondents did not meet people outside of their culture until they traveled for further education.

All interviewees were asked the same base level 20 questions, though some respondents required further clarification and digging for me to feel satisfied with the answers given. I conducted each interview using the voice memo application on my phone and uploaded the audio files to a transcription service named “Descript”. All voice recordings were deleted from my phone upon their upload to Descript. I used this service to store, transcribe, and code the interviews for easier retrieval of information. After these interviews were transcribed, I created an “analytical memo” document for each which consisted of a summary of the main takeaways from the interviews as well as key quotes that I would want to use in the larger paper with critical explanations for how these quotes would be worked into my paper and relate to the larger themes throughout. These memos significantly aided the completion of my research as they allowed me to record both the objective information that was presented to me, and it also provided a valuable space for me to take notice of any biases I might have had coming into the interview depending on who I was interviewing, my familiarity with them, the time/circumstances that I was conducting the interview, and how I might have pivoted my research approach depending on the types of responses I was receiving.

Section III. Cultural Appropriation

Before we can analyze the differing reactions to instances of Black cultural appropriation, we first have to establish a working framework of what cultural appropriation is. Richard Rogers (2006:475) defines cultural appropriation in his work as “the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture” — which, for the purpose of this paper, refers to Black hairstyles, speech, slang, fashion, dance, cuisine, and social behaviors. He then goes on to explain that there are four categories of cultural appropriation: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. Each, in Rogers’ analysis, has a different intent and social impact. Cultural exchange refers to a reciprocal relationship between two cultures where vernacular, dance, music, etc, are all voluntarily shared (Rogers 2006:478). This first type is not exactly applicable to the cases of Black cultural appropriation that I explore, as this cannot be a voluntary exchange if there is a split in opinion regarding what is appropriation and what is not over the same situations. It is also difficult to gauge what the exchange would be in this sense, as it would similarly need to be studied how Black Americans appropriate from other cultures. While this is surely a valid area of study, it is not one I plan to explore.

Rogers (2006:479-480) further explains that cultural dominance is “the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance.” This second type does not apply to our analysis because Black Americans are not systemically in positions of power. While it is true that much of popular culture in mainstream media as well as on social media contains trends or influences created by Black Americans, it can hardly be said that this then situates Blackness in a dominant position that renders other communities defenseless against its influences. For cultural exploitation, Rogers (2006:486) defines it as “the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation.” This type of appropriation is not entirely applicable for the same reasons that Black communities are no less in subordinate positions than other groups of color.
Furthermore, if one were to apply the analyzed subjects to this definition, it would quickly become problematic to bestow the role of a colonizer to any of these marginalized groups. As this definition stands, it does not apply to the purposes of this project. The same goes for Rogers’ (2006:477) definition of transculturation, which he describes as “cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic…” This type of appropriation might be true in some cases, as the origins of certain dance or music styles are difficult to pinpoint, though there are certainly aspects of Black culture that cannot be confused for originating in other communities—despite them being appreciated by individuals from other cultures. While the definitions for cultural exploitation and transculturation do not work as they currently stand for defining what Black cultural appropriation looks like among non-Black communities of color, it is possible to alter them so that they may better fit. If the purposes of appropriating aspects of another culture are solely for the benefit of the perpetrator, this is an action that can be performed by anyone instead of solely reserving this role for members of a dominant or colonizing culture. If this were the case, cultural appropriation would only be a ‘white thing’. All instances of Black cultural appropriation invoke concerns of cultural degradation where people who are not from the culture that they are appropriating find the authority to dictate what the victimized culture should look like and who should be allowed to engage with it. Another concern of cultural appropriation is the preservation of cultural elements and objects so that they do not fall prey to commodification. These are valid realities that apply to all instances of cultural appropriation and are not solely relegated to the racial binary. As such, for the purposes of this paper, cultural appropriation will be redefined simply as ‘acts in which marginalized cultures are taken and used by a differing culture to serve their interests or otherwise benefit from their associations’ to ensure that all forms of appropriation are included.

Section IV. Black English

Black English, known by many other names including African American Vernacular English (AAVE), is a dialect of English that originally developed as a pidgin language from enslaved people as they attempted to find a common method of conversing with one another. This pidgin later developed into a Creole that allowed for the post-enslavement generations to be able to better communicate with each other after having been dispersed (Spears 2008). To the present day, Black English has evolved via the influence of different regional dialects, political tensions, and social factors such as the Great Migration and the Civil Rights Movement. The discourse surrounding the legitimacy of Black English has been long-standing due to the various perspectives that can be offered. It is most often spoken in urban areas in relation to Black culture, as Black English has its own unique vocabulary and structural rules that mark its distinction from standard or traditional English. Black English has historically been stigmatized in a society that prioritizes traditional English because that is the form that most benefits those in positions of power. Black individuals who are not placed in those positions of power understand that the ability to be well-versed in this language is crucial for their social advancement on some level via the means of progression through their social connections and communal support as their intellect is not always enough on its own. Language is not only a means of communication but also a powerful tool for social and cultural identity (Oluo 2019). The stigma attached to Black English has often led to negative stereotypes and discrimination against Black people, as some individuals have differing perspectives on how Black people should strive to achieve such advancement—either maintaining ties to their culture and celebrating their cultural connections...
or simply assimilating into mainstream expectations that ultimately suppress vibrant Black expression—which furthers the divide between Black communities and groups that do not validate the importance of their culture. Because Black English has its own set of rules, grammar, and syntax, people who strictly adhere to traditional English are unable to see the value that the dialect holds for people who do not fit into their traditional standards (Jackson 2019). These stigmas and stereotypes were prominent points of discussion throughout my interviews, with most respondents expressing the validity of Black English despite not knowing the historical importance of it. A few respondents, though, shared their confusion about the dialect and illustrated the ways in which they had been brought up, as well as the narratives that they were surrounded by that aided in influencing their points of view.

A few of the Latine-identifying interviewees reported that upon immigrating to the United States at a young age, they were introduced to lower income levels and a wider range of demographics than they had previously been exposed to, and carried these standards about class and language with them. One South American respondent, Eliana, extensively notes how her parents would surveil her forms of expression to ensure that “the world perceives us the way that they think is good and proper” (Eliana. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 20 November 2023). They would regulate the clothing that she wore, the friends that she could hang out with, and the languages and expressions she could speak. This was not that much different from another Latine respondent, Giovanni, who explained that he left a life of privilege in Central America due to political tensions and found himself having to navigate Queens, New York, which has a varied range of demographics as well as a rich urban dialect. He explains that his mother had a large influence on the ways that he perceived this new environment and subsequently, the ways that he interacted with others. His mother repeatedly told him that even though they were low income now, the goal was to get back to the status that they were at and he had to act as though he was preparing himself for that day to come. Giovanni admitted that due to this, he actively refrained from picking up the “New York slang” that the people around him would use, as this didn’t fit the image of being proper: “so I also like, in my brain, I internalized this of like, Oh, you are privileged. You have, you have something that's different. So don't act like you're like everyone else. And like, so it was just like a weird internal thing that it was very much put by my mother on me. So that really defined my, the way I speak” (Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 21 December 2023). From these two examples, we can see that parental influence and societal values surrounding status are important components to consider when analyzing how language and expression are acquired at a young age.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is surprising that both of these respondents went on to develop a familiarity with this way of speaking, so much so that it became integrated into their regular forms of expression. They both shared that much of their early identities related to their academic prowess of being “IB kids” or being very involved in their school programming, which did not leave them with much room to reflect on their positionalities outside of school. In fact, none of the interviewees identified that they had much reason to think about race and the ways that they interacted with people who had different ethnicities because they all came from similar backgrounds as each other. One interviewee, Miguel, explains: “we were always around other minorities so some of us got a little too comfortable using words we probably shouldn’t have [...] I never felt the need to change the way I spoke growing up [or that] this isn’t the right way to speak because this is how everyone speaks”. This sentiment was heavily echoed throughout many of the interviews I conducted, which points toward an important link between the type of proximity and access that people have to language (specifically Black English) in
their most formative years. All of the Latinx respondents primarily grew up surrounded by people who held the same or similar identities as them, and who all spoke Spanish. Because of this, none of them felt a specific need to pay attention to cultural affinities or community building, due to everyone having similar backgrounds and interests. More specifically, they all learned English and the slang that they spoke from parents, peers, television, and media — the latter of these proving to be a primary source of cultural exposure for these respondents to races outside of their own — rather than from traditional curriculum. For most, it took moving to a new state for college where the demographics significantly contrasted from what they were used to, for them to be able to analyze the language that they had acquired growing up and to realize that much of it contained terminology originating from or associated with Black English.

Walter Wolfram (1996) aims to explain how social stratification and mobility within Black communities relate to their speech differences. He suggests that many factors contribute to the different ways in which members of Black communities in various areas speak Black English differently than others do. For example, the author suggests that sex, racial isolation, age, style, etc, can impact the ways that different groups speak and in turn should point to what social class they are in, as a white dialect or a traditional way of speaking English, is the standard they are up against (Wolfram 1996). This reaffirms that Black communities are not monolithic, but that there is a shared understanding within the community that Black English is an important mode of communication that shows a collective value in the face of white standard order. Black English is not a manner of speaking or expression of self that is meant to be universally understood by everyone, as it carries a rich history and has strong cultural ties to Black communities specifically (Brown 2003). The use of Black English in popular culture has also been a source of debate, with some arguing that it perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinforces racial divisions, while others argue that it is a form of cultural expression that should be embraced (Gaston 2021). This indicates a division in Black individuals’ perspectives surrounding Black English usage from non-Black people.

The use of Black English has been largely debated and contested, with some groups arguing that it is a dialect of English that should be celebrated and respected as other dialects are, while other groups argue that it is a form of improper English that should be corrected. Cunningham (2017) explains the complexities that are involved in Black English being viewed as a legitimate and respectable language, including that at the suggestion that Black English should be included in education settings for smoother comprehension among students, opposition sounded. He writes, “Ebonics, people said, was simply a collection of ‘slang and bad grammar’ — not nearly enough to make a language.” While none of the interview respondents shared this sentiment, some did express that this different way of speaking was a bit difficult for them to understand or identify the value beyond it being easily identifiable as a dialect important to Black Americans. One interviewee in particular shared his thoughts on Black English, saying, “I think Black, Black English, like, um, I feel like, um, in the past I didn't really understand. Many aspects of it, because like, when people would speak black English to me, I would just catch phrases that I don't understand, or like, the pronunciation is really different that I don't really know. And, like, very intuitively, I would think that this is not proper. But, I mean, what is proper anyway?” (Calvin. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 12 December 2023). Calvin is the only East Asian-identifying respondent that I interviewed and grew up in a strict and traditional culture that did not welcome much deviation from standard order. Similar to the academic focus mentioned above with Eliana and Giovanni, Calvin explains that his identities and the values that he came to hold were essentially chosen for him rather than him being able to explore interests for
himself. His traditional schooling background in China focused on fostering critical thinking and writing skills to best prepare a highly competitive profile for him when it came time to apply to colleges and did not allow much “free time” to develop a social life that he came to significantly value.

As this sense of formalness is normal to him, Calvin finds himself solely speaking English in a conservatively proper way, largely void of slang and short-hand expressions. Calvin also attended a predominantly white, private boarding high school in California, which proved to be a difficult and exclusionary experience for him due to the form of language expression he was taught to value versus the linguistic norms that were more prevalent among his peers. He explains that the students at this school perceived him to be “uptight” for not engaging in slang and for correcting other students’ writing assignments, which did not allow him to foster a meaningful social connection with them at this place. This contrast between Calvin’s more traditional linguistic upbringing and the linguistic landscape of his school highlights the nuanced social dynamics embedded within language and expression. From his negative recollections of his time there, it is not unreasonable to assume that his peers were better able to navigate the social terrain of this school with their slang-infused speech, while Calvin felt estranged by this divide. This experience emphasizes that language is not just a means of communication, but is a marker of social capital, where certain speech patterns confer a sense of belonging and "coolness." This phenomenon is further explained by Mary Bucholtz (2010) whose research primarily centers around language acquisition and identity markers among white youth in California schools. She explains that these youth primarily emphasize their status through the slang that they use, which is significantly gathered from the social media that they have access to and is primarily attributed to Black English. Bucholtz identifies that to the students, their slang usage makes them sound “cool” to one another and designates an in-group vs. outsider role within the school that dictates how each position is able to interact with each other. For example, the use of slang that is used separates the “popular crowd” from the “nerds”, which consequently comes with different forms of treatment for those within the social categories — the popular crowd having more social weight in garnering attention and respect than those other groups.

With this understanding, Calvin might have been able to economically relate to the students at this school in terms of having similar economic statuses and the privilege that comes from that, but this language disparity surpassed those similarities to negatively influence his social experience. It is also important to analyze his responses about Californians and the connections between language and social life in comparison to the other West Coast responses that I have. Calvin went to a predominantly white private boarding school and recognized that in a way, he was similar to them in the sense that they all had money and some amount of privilege to be able to travel freely, but the language still proved to be a barrier in forming a social life and valuing community ties. He has very different thoughts about community relations and ethnic affinities than the other respondents do, going so far as to say that: “a lot of POC are very white, too. Like their behaviors, values, and everything, they seemed pretty white to me. So I don’t culturally characterize them as people of color, like I just don’t see them that way”. Through Calvin only having been exposed to this form of slang expression at this school and his decision to maintain a strict East Asian friend group while at his current college to feel some sort of connection to the values that he knows, his views on Black English and slang usage have not been able to change due to his lack of proximity to Blackness and only having these language associations to negative experiences. Because of Calvin’s experiences, he is only able to view culture and its components through a Black and white lens—a “proper” and an improper lens.
Giovanni also came from a place of financial privilege, though his outlook on language and social life significantly changed when his income and environment changed. Through this, he had more involved proximity to different ethnicities and cultures and their ways of thinking and living. This shows that beyond economic status, cultural similarities working in tandem with economic status (in this case, being low income for the other respondents), have a huge impact on the type of social life that these individuals live and the language that they acquire.

**Low-Income Schools and Urban Neighborhoods**

As previously discussed, institutional white America has successfully controlled the labor market, capital, housing, and political spectrums to enact violence on Black communities throughout history. Even so, the one thing that they have been unable to successfully control is the language and forms of expression that Black communities use to better connect with their culture (McWhorter 2021). White privilege continually allows white individuals to gain access to resources and opportunities that are denied to people of color, which has led to economic instability and disparities in wealth distribution. Due to this inherent opposition, Black English has become a source of pride for many Black individuals due to it consisting of complex grammatical structures that Black communities have familiarized themselves with to communicate with one another, but that people who are only used to mainstream English are unable to properly follow (Cunningham 2017). The vernacular is often used at home amongst Black families in some urban areas and is also largely used by Black youth in school settings. Segregation laws and policies have perpetuated racial inequality by limiting access to housing, education, and employment opportunities (Bourdieu 1991). Because these redlining policies frequently target Black communities, it makes sense that for many of these schools, the dominant demographic is Black individuals—some of whom are familiar with Black English—indicating the type of speech they are mainly exposed to. It is not uncommon for the schools in urban neighborhoods to be low-income schools in the aftermath of enslavement and segregation, which allows for marginalized groups to be in close proximity together—often resulting in them forming friendships with one another as opposed to forming lasting connections with white groups. Data indicates that cross-cultural affinity is due to similar histories of oppression and forced relocation (Chun 2001). One respondent struggled to explain this phenomenon, saying that “and not to say that there wasn’t many, like, [white people] out there that I could have been friends with, it’s just [...] I found myself having the same interests [as his Black friends]” (CJ. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 5 February 2024). This shows that even though there are white people physically present in the same schools that the POC students attend, and presumably belong to similar economic backgrounds as the POC students, there is still some glaring difference in identity that causes for the POC respondents to prefer connections with other marginalized groups over white groups.

Many Black American families were shuffled into low-income housing and neighborhoods after the Great Migration, and have been battling gentrification and systemic inequality in their attempts to achieve upward mobility. One article explains, “housing segregation did not happen by accident, but rather through intentional public policy, such as redlining in the 1930s where Black and Brown areas were labeled by the government as ‘hazardous,’ ‘subversive,’ ‘inharmonious,’ and ‘lower grade’ populations” (Opportunity Home). Black communities were pushed into these underdeveloped areas as an attempt by white Americans to limit their contributions to the larger society through voting and cultural expressions. Similarly, many non-white immigrating families - many of which do not have
English as their first language - find themselves having to relocate to these low-income areas as they either come from similar backgrounds of struggle or find that they are placed into these realities as their credentials do not always smoothly transfer over after moving. This was the case for all but one of the respondents, as they are all children of immigrants and were forced to assimilate—along with their families—into the different ways of moving through life in the United States. These families then have to learn and adapt to the culture that they find themselves in and end up sharing some of the formative characteristics of the demographics around them, including language and speech patterns (Boyd 1997). Their children also most likely attend the same low-income or neighborhood schools that the native population does (in this case, urban Black communities) which promotes racial and cultural sharing to ideally promote a better understanding of what different values and practices they each have. In fact, most respondents were able to estimate the percentage levels that broke down the racial demographics of the schools that they attended (all, save for Calvin, being in low-income urban areas). Most of the Asian respondents reported that they were in the minority within their schools, with Black students being in the majority, closely followed by Latinx students, and then white and Asian students. This was a somewhat similar breakdown for many of the Latinx respondents as well, though their leading numbers in demographics primarily consisted of more Latinx students followed by varying mixes of Black or Asian (Filipino and Nepalese), and then white students. There is a general consensus among the respondents that they all felt a sense of comfort at their proximity with one another to be able to participate in the same activities (like sports), speak the same ways (sometimes “[getting] a little too comfortable using words [they] probably shouldn’t have”), and feel a certain sense of belonging with each other due to their similar backgrounds (Miguel. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 22 February 2024). While this begins to explain how cultural connections are formed through physical proximity and similar experiences, it does not lead us much closer to understanding the respondent’s perceptions of Black culture and language and the value they have in society.

When it comes to Black English and culture, non-Black people of color must be mindful of the ways in which they interact with them in order to avoid reinforcing damaging stereotypes or neglecting the distinct experiences and contributions of Black communities (O’Toole 2015). Instances of cultural borrowing typically occur in environments where marginalized groups grow up in the same area together and are exposed to the same speech and mannerisms. For example, Martinez-Morrison (2014:5) conducted a study with Latinos—mainly Chicanos—in the Bay Area to understand their linkages to hip-hop and Black culture, as well as the “social experiences of people racially marked as ‘brown’ [converging] with those of [Black] populations, creating culturally conjectural urban identities.” Many urban places can be analyzed for the connections between Black communities and other communities of color that participate in Black culture and language, though California is a valuable place to begin due to instances of cultural borrowing and the emergence of mainstream hip-hop culture through the collaborations between Black and Latino communities. This link directly explains the historicized occurrence of urban and working-class Latino communities incorporating Black slang, speech, and idioms into their naturalized forms of expression due to the sense of belonging that they have felt. This sentiment has perhaps been passed down generationally if their families are still located within low-income areas. Martinez-Morrison (2014:3) explains that “U.S. Latinos find themselves in a racially ambiguous, contradictory netherworld as, on the one hand, a people without race (according to state-sponsored demography) and, on the other, an intensely racialized group subject to brutal xenophobic attack (at the level of lived experience)”. This indicates that similar to Black
Americans, Latines in the United States are often subjected to the quality of life that comes with white imposition and institutional neglect.

Karen Pace (2016) quotes Myke Johnson (1995) in emphasizing that “Cultural sharing involves interaction with the whole person and community, reciprocal giving and receiving, sharing of struggle as well as joy, receiving what the community wants to give, not what we want to take”. This might point to why it is often white groups that receive public scorn and academic attention for appropriating and benefiting from Blackness as opposed to groups of color; similar histories appear to be important qualities for an understood sense of authenticity in relation to Blackness. To support this, she also includes that “clearly ‘street’ as well as ‘hood’ serve as metonyms for low-income, high-crime social spaces in which few economic opportunities exist outside of involvement in informal economies - activities locals refer to in using the ambiguous phrase ‘hustling’” (Martinez-Morrison 2014:14). This reading explains that Black communities disproportionately occupy these “hood” or “ghetto” spaces the most on a national scale and subsequently are faced with the inequities and violence that are attracted to poverty-stricken areas. Martinez-Morrison adds that in multiracial low-income neighborhoods as well as low-income blue-collar suburbs, “young people from Latino, Asian, and Pacific Island immigrant families also suffer the negative [impacts]” of these situations which place them in similar circumstances as Black American youth (2014:14-15). Black individuals might have become more comfortable with their peers from other races due to their similar experiences which would explain why the author includes that the Black Americans would frequently use the “n-word” around their Latino friends and were not offended when their Latino friends would repeat it to them. There is an in-group factor at work here that suggests users of Black culture must have a certain amount of familiarity or proximity to Blackness.

This connection might explain why the Latinx-identifying respondents did not recognize (and some still were unable to make the connection) that much of the language they were using had links to Black English, as this cultural affinity to Blackness is almost inherent in their ways of existing. One respondent, Ines, identified a few similarities between the language usage and outside perceptions of Black English and Spanish. She shares that “to some degree, both of these get kind of looked down upon, especially by people who speak more formally, or people who [are in] the higher studies of academia and whatnot”, which promotes ties between these languages due to their similar experiences with scrutiny. Ines also describes that the ways both Spanish and Black English are spoken have similarities in how many phrases are used informally or are conjugated to shorter versions of the word for better ease of communication. She notes that this is common for general Spanish Speakers, but is also specially linked to the type of Spanish that is spoken in Texas due to the southern influence that impacts both languages. Ines, along with another Tex-Mex respondent, Isabella, were able to draw further connections between their culture and Black culture primarily through food and music. They shared that reggaeton has a lot of influence from rap culture, that they value the feelings of community and “good vibes” that come from cookouts or carne asada, and that both cultures are able to relate to navigating institutional racism. Due to this, the Latinx respondents also felt a connection to Black culture through shared values in navigating this racism via a sense of uplifting their communities and bringing them to success alongside them. More specifically, one interviewee explains that whether “it’s Mexican or Latin American [or] Black culture [...] I’m doing this for my people back at home. I’m not going to waste the opportunity” (Miguel. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 22 February 2024). This emphasis on communal advancement was a sentiment shared throughout the interviews when it came to linking community and culture primarily among the
Latinx and South Asian respondents, but it was difficult to pinpoint what exactly *culture* meant to each person and what it was composed of. This led to different understandings of what I was able to identify as being linked to Black culture and language versus what some respondents were only able to identify as their “normal”.

It was difficult for the majority of the respondents to define what “culture” was to them, and subsequently, it was even more difficult for them to pinpoint what *Black* culture was to be able to distinguish its attributes from what they knew from their own cultures and popular culture. One interview, in particular, yielded a response that perfectly encapsulated the confusing act of trying to define what Black cultural identity would look like and how they might be proximate to it:

Oh boy, I don't, I don't even know how to approach this. There's obviously the stereotypes, which like, bad, but like, it's like, it's so ingrained in our minds because we grew up in the U.S. It's like, fried chicken, or like, do-rags, or like, sagging. It's like, nothing good, but it's not what I associate necessarily with black culture. I feel like rap music is something I do associate with like, Black American culture, um, AVE, AAVE, obviously, like, slang and like the way African Americans speak is like seen as cool in like movies and like, you know, and like that's what I would associate with black culture. But at the same time, it's kind of hard for me because I didn't, I wasn't exposed to black American culture growing up for the first 18 years of my life. And it wasn't until Haverford where I really got a chance to meet. African Americans or black people. So it's I don't really have an idea in my mind like on what is it because I didn't ever grow up and it was never really like that big of it wasn't that big in my childhood (Miguel. Interview by Taylor Johnson, 22 February 2024).

This quote touches on a number of themes that are important, namely: slang, media, and both the perception of and exposure to Black culture. Miguel, as well as most of the other interviewees, expressed a great struggle to know how to begin to answer questions surrounding culture, language, and proximity, due to the vagueness of a word like “culture” as well as their caution around saying anything that might be offensively all-encompassing of Black identities. It is telling to note that Miguel used the word “obviously” to explain that slang, AAVE, or Black English is associated with the way that Black Americans speak in a general — and presumably frequent — manner, for this to be a common understanding of how they express themselves. Having primarily grown up with only media representations of what Black English and culture looked like, these stereotypes and the negative connotations that they hold became ingrained in his mind and were the dominant views that he held about Black individuals prior to being able to associate with them more at Haverford. For non-Black American POC who are unable to have this more personal connection and proximity to Blackness and Black English or who have not done extensive research on the cultural values and expressions of Black American communities, these stereotypes and dramatized ways of acting and speaking are all that they know. With this mindset, it can be difficult for these individuals to be able to identify what Black culture might look like or what Black English might sound like if they come across examples of people who are not wearing a du-rag, sagging their pants, smacking their heads to relieve itches, talking loud and aggressive, or speaking in seemingly incomplete sentences as many films, shows, and memes would suggest. Few respondents were able to identify the history of Black English or separate their slang usage from regular urban slang to having links to AAVE.

When attempting to define culture in a general sense, most respondents pointed to the
identities that they held and shared about the family traditions, food, and values that are instilled in them to be important parts of shaping who they are. At large, phrases such as “community”, “shared experiences and histories”, “celebration”, and “belonging” were associations that were frequently made in relation to cultural identities throughout the interviews—which shows that culture is viewed as a communal concept rather than an individualistic one. Unsurprisingly, all of the respondents were in favor of sharing aspects of their cultures with people who did not hold the identities of those cultures, some believing fusion to be inevitable. CJ, for example, asserts that it’s “just how it is, you know, when people grow up around each other. It just tends to be a fusion [...] like the way I speak, a lot of the music I listen to is influenced by people around me” (Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 5 February 2024). He also shares that he feels a sense of pride in his culture when he is able to bring people into his life by inviting them to cultural celebrations as there is not a large Cambodian community around him. He was able to make a connection between his Cambodian culture and Black culture due to the similar ways in which these communities make it a priority to uplift and celebrate each other’s accomplishments.

Many of the other respondents shared their thoughts on cultural fusion with experiences of when it is done well. The general sentiment behind cultural fusion is that “there’s some people who can be appreciative of the culture and are actually willing to learn from people who share the culture, and they’re open to trying different things”, which is much preferred over people participating in events on their own without guidance or having done research beforehand (Ines. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 12 December 2023). The respondents agreed that the latter would be considered appropriation, and frequently used the example of how people who are not Mexican celebrate Cinco De Mayo. Regarding this holiday, Ines goes on to question “who the fuck even celebrates that? [...] I feel like it’s just things like that, where it’s like, the stereotypical mariachi hat and big ass mustache”, further explaining how most of the people who celebrate this holiday are ill-informed about its purpose and maintain degrading stereotypes about her culture. Migues agreed and further stated that he would consider this to be an instance where an aspect of his culture was being appropriated rather than appreciated; “it looks like white people doing Cinco de Drinko [...] they wear sombreros or they’ll speak to you in English [using stereotypes]” (Interviewed by Taylor Johnson 22 February 2024). It is important to note that for both of these instances of appropriation, these respondents were referring to the mistreatment of their culture done by white people instead of other people of color. In fact, none of the interviewees appeared to have any negative perceptions about other people of color engaging with their traditions, language, or culture and consistently brought up injustices enacted by white people.

White people are the only demographic to have not been forced into positions of systemic oppression and have instead been the perpetrators of harm, which makes their instances of appropriation and neglect more readily expected and able to be scorned by onlookers. Because marginalized groups have not been in that position before, of being structurally recognized as perpetrators of Black exploitation, it becomes harder to identify and address those instances of appropriation and neglect because the motives become different. It is less likely that marginalized groups have ill intentions in mind when adopting attributes of Black culture because they systematically have nothing to gain from this—seeing as Black communities are consistently at the lower end of the stratification pole—which introduces the necessity to analyze the social aspects at hand between communities that engage with popular culture. Danny Cortez Martinez (2012) provides an in-depth ethnographic analysis of how non-white and non-Black communities also adopt Black English and mannerisms into their regular forms of expression, but that there is a different context held there than when this action is done by a white individual.
Miguel concludes that even though the other people of color that he engages with are not Mexican, there is still a sense of kinship and protectiveness that is enacted due to them never being the dominant cultures in the room. Without having this understanding of the different factors at play that impact the type of proximity and understanding that non-Black POC have of Black English and culture, it would have been simple to assume that those who engage in this form of expression without acknowledging its cultural and historical ties, would be appropriating Black English to boost their social capital by allowing them to adopt a style that does not align with how they appear phenotypically.

Non-Black POC individuals are not able to systemically advance in the same ways that white communities can based on their race and ethnicity alone, but they are still able to financially and socially benefit from aspects of Blackness through the access and in-group treatment that they can receive. For example, the Kardashians frequently financially profit from fashion designs created by Black-owned businesses, Christina Aguilera and Jennifer Lopez have both appropriated Black slang, hairstyles, and fashion into their music videos, and Vjay Chokal-Ingam — Mindy Kaling’s brother — faked a Black identity to get into medical school. These examples are non-exhaustive but show that it is possible for non-Black POC to socially and economically benefit from appropriating Blackness. Through this, we are able to see that other marginalized groups view instances of appropriation through a binary lens as well, with white people inherently being in the oppressor role due to their histories. In this, people of color feel an automatic connection with each other to unite against a common oppressor, and it appears that many of the respondents operate within this unspoken understanding of cross-cultural kinship but are not as self-reflective about the content that they consume and the expressions that they incorporate into their normalized language—often causing them to participate in (and sometimes incorrectly use) Black English. A commonplace where all of the respondents cited having received their knowledge about popular culture and Black English was through their friendships with urban individuals and social media.

Section V. Social Media Influence

Social media is often used as a method for some to disconnect from the overwhelming events in their daily lives because of the jovial content that those platforms provide. Trevor Boffone (2022) explains that the social media platform, Tiktok, has been able to shape larger popular culture in the United States, as well as how it has been used to discuss perspectives on race, gender, sexuality, etc. He details that Black Americans have shaped the platform due to their contributions, and explains that their influence (and language and mannerisms) have become mainstream and appropriated by others due to the high levels of visibility that these videos receive. Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, to focus on a few, all utilize frameworks that allow their users to create and react to content that is primarily used to provide levity through entertaining videos. These videos generally cater to user interest through an algorithm that is encoded into each platform to show content that is most relevant to their individual audiences. For Instagram specifically, Eliana explains this concept with the “Reels” function that Instagram has as “the way that the Reels function is based on an algorithm. So, a lot of it is kind of similar to how TikTok works in terms of like, your for you page and like the sides of the reels that you’re on. Especially because a lot of people directly like, upload the TikTok content to reels if they’re influencers or whatever” (Eliana. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 20 November 2023).

This shows that the average social media user understands that the content they are viewing is not through a random curation, but through an expansive interactive process that allows for these
platforms to best anticipate the type of content to personalize for the individual. Most of the interviewees reported that their main platforms of choice were Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram — with Instagram being the most preferred platform for about 77% of respondents.

All interviewees were able to break down their typical daily usage for each platform and the ways that their engagement might differ across each site, with some explaining that these major platforms are primarily used for keeping in touch with people who are not in close proximity to them, or for gathering world information in place of typical news outlets. A surprising amount of the interviewees expressed this latter sentiment, explaining that it is more convenient for them to get their news information from TikTok, Twitter, or Instagram because of how fast and easily digestible the content is. In fact, one respondent details that she uses TikTok for everything; “if I have a question, I literally ask it on TikTok before I go to Google. It probably knows first. And people will tell you the truth and they won't be paid journalists. I trust it” (Isabella. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, December 21 2023). Trusting news information from social media over accredited news organizations might sound absurd to the average non-social media user, but this was a common sentiment expressed throughout these interviews. Many respondents, though, explained that their main purpose for using these platforms was for entertainment purposes by staying up to date on trends, following their favorite sports teams, or engaging with memes. On average, respondents reported that they spend about three to five hours a day on social media for their range of entertainment. This phenomenon goes to show just how integral these platforms are in the lives of college students, and how dependent they are on these platforms for their daily needs.

With all of this in mind, it is not surprising that much of the content viewed on these platforms and the information shared through them are absorbed into their target audiences and become encoded into how these individuals come to express themselves. This can be shown through interpersonal connections where an individual might express that they associate certain songs with the corresponding videos that they may have watched, linking certain sound bites to real-world situations (similar to someone saying “dun dun dun” when something dramatic happens), and through incorporating slang and expressions that they have learned online into their regular speech. For example, before even asking questions about the respondent's slang and language expression, I noticed that many of the respondents were already incorporating terms that are primarily found in popular culture through social media into their responses. More specifically, I noticed that respondents were using expressions like “slay”, “be so serious”, or “period”, which are all common phrases that are used in Instagram Reels and Tiktok videos primarily when content creators are recounting entertaining stories or enthusiastically supporting (“hyping up”) a situation. While some respondents indicated that they were unable to pinpoint what phrases could be considered to be linked to Black English as opposed to simply urban culture or Gen Z language, one respondent shared that these terms make her uncomfortable because she has noticed that “people are aware that these things come from Black culture, but it’s become so normal to use when you’re texting or making a TikTok that it becomes a normal part of your speech pattern” (Eliana. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 20 November 2023).

Additionally, I observed individuals using the habitual “be” in their responses as well as incorporating phrases like “imma” and “finna” into their speech — which I have also viewed being used by some content creators in their videos — though it was surprising to me how naturalized these expressions became in some of these respondents. All of these phrases have ties to Black English, and some respondents were able to explain this link while others simply associated this style of speech with “urban slang” or “Gen Z slang”.
Much of popular culture is significantly influenced by Black English and Black culture due to its fashion, music, mannerisms, and media. Popular culture is mainly portrayed through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok which allow viewers to learn about and engage with dances/phrases/ways of speaking/mannerisms that are attributed to Black culture and speech patterns without acknowledging that this is where they originated from. This causes people —youth especially—to adopt those forms of expressions as their own under the guise of it simply being what is popular in current society instead of learning about the importance that those expressions hold in Black cultures (Kopano 2014). Black cultural attributes in the broad sense have become intricately woven with mainstream American culture — allowing for individuals who utilize popular social media platforms to have unmitigated access to the slang and speech that Black Americans utilize. Giovanni inadvertently proved this in one of his responses in which he shared that “you see things on Tiktok [that are] very funny like ‘oh, that’s an Asian Black lady’ you know what I mean? Like how they’re raised and all of that” (Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, 21 December 2023). He did not expand on this answer, but we can conclude from his inclusion of “how they’re raised” and his other commentary about how robust the urban or “Gen Z” slang that he has been surrounded by is, that he is able to associate the tone of voice and types of words that are chosen with Black English. While it appears that he is able to make this connection, he still uses the term “Gen Z” slang to describe Black English, which reveals that he does not have a firm handle on what constitutes Black English.

It is not a surprise, then, that the respondents' discernment of the connection between internet language and Black culture — specifically Black English — appears to lack clarity due to limited exposure to Black individuals who employ such linguistic styles. Even with some respondents having grown up in predominantly Black and Brown (Latinx) neighborhoods, their closest friendships were often not with Black-identifying individuals for them to be able to claim a close proximity to Blackness. Instead, their primary encounters with these expressions mainly occurs within the realm of social media, thereby constraining their contextual understanding of Black English, expressions, and their cultural significance. Consequently, the absence of meaningful interactions with Black culture, apart from the standard encounters within historical narratives about enslavement and the civil rights era in core high school curriculum within the U.S. greatly contributes to the observed difficulty in recognizing this linguistic association. It is not until the respondents were able to extend their educational journeys beyond their immediate home environments and be introduced to diverse populations and cultures that they were able to begin to learn about the current lived experiences and ways of living that Black Americans employ that might rival the representation shown in media.

About 44% of respondents indicated they did not have a personal connection to aspects of Black culture that went beyond what they had learned from the media until getting to college and forming new, diverse, friend groups. Isabella perfectly sums up this collective sentiment by sharing; “I'm like, I literally met one black person my whole life growing up until I came to college. Like, I didn't know anything. It sounds silly and it sounds like I'm lying, but I really didn't. And a lot of things I didn't know what black culture, I realized later that they were black culture” (Isabella. Interviewed by Taylor Johnson, December 21 2023). She explains that she was only able to learn what Black culture was through interpersonal conversations with people who engaged with Black culture as the education she received in Texas and the media that she was exposed to were not substantial. This revelation is important to know when considering what factors might be at play that allow for non-Black POC to utilize Black English in their speech, as
this reflective process is what distinguishes cultural fusion and appreciation from appropriation and exploitation.

Section VI. Further Application

Language acquisition and usage, particularly in the context of Black English, is clearly a complex interplay that involves various factors working in tandem. People decide the type of English that they primarily use after having been exposed to multiple versions of English, as this is a reflection of the diverse linguistic landscapes that individuals navigate. These influences include proximity to Black English, social media influence, and social perceptions within familial and friendship relationships. These landscapes encompass vernacular speech patterns that extend beyond any singular standard and are not widely understood to be linked to any specific culture or form of expression, despite their inherent connections. Because of this dynamic nature of linguistic exchange, Black English is widely viewed to have transcended racial boundaries due to it becoming ingrained in mainstream culture and media. Individuals may unconsciously adopt speech patterns from their immediate environment, which, as shown through the respondent's data, does not necessarily align with their racial or cultural background. The transmission of language and cultural norms through familial interactions, media consumption, and social networks blurs the lines between voluntary and involuntary linguistic acquisition, as people are not always able to choose their living situations and subsequently, the communities they are surrounded by. Ultimately, the question of agency in language acquisition prompts reflection on the interconnectedness of choice, socialization, and cultural proximity. Whether through deliberate selection of social circles or algorithmic exposure on digital platforms, individuals are constantly negotiating their linguistic identities within the context of their social environments.

Further applications of this research could include a longitudinal study that tracks language acquisition patterns and subsequent identity formation processes in non-Black POC from childhood through adulthood. This would allow for a more personalized and inclusive way to examine the role that mainstream media and social media platforms play in shaping language, and visualizing the spread of Black English to non-Black communities. Having a case study that follows individuals through their educational years, would also allow for further insight into the ways that language policies and educational practices are able to influence the perception and use of different language varieties like Black English among urban youth. With that, this research would be able to address the aforementioned issues of language conformity and standardization as well as the role that educational institutions have in promoting linguistic diversity and inclusivity.
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