

swade10

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Chapter I.

Miley Cyrus Didn't Invent Twerking

She didn't. Let me try to contextualize the absurdity of the claim that she did with an example that damn near all of Wonder Bread America can grasp: Imagine one day Gucci Mane starts doing The Chicken Dance, I mean really going for it. He's doing it at all his concerts, he performs it at the Grammy's, he does it on Ellen, at the VMA's... But the thing is he does it wrong. The order is all messed up, he does it backwards, he shakes his ass first and ends with the duck hands; but maintains that this is in fact The Chicken Dance. Soon, everyone who rocks with Guwop starts doing the same backwards version of the dance and acting like he came up with the whole thing. You see it everywhere, you can't avoid it, it's the flyest new trend. Now, if you're an OG Wonder Bread American you know The Chicken Dance. The Chicken Dance is your shit. When it comes on at a wedding you're on the dance floor like watch out, I got this. So you're shocked to suddenly see people of color not only doing your dance, but doing it wrong, and acting like it's new. You sound like an old head talkin' bout how you used to Chicken Dance at your middle school dances, how Gucci didn't put you on, how everyone who thinks it's new is a culture vulture; I mean you and The Chicken Dance have *history*. It makes no sense and it seems like no one is listening to you: This is what I mean about twerking.

Growing up on the west side of Lansing, Michigan, twerking was self-expression. Good twerking, I'm talkin' isolated cheek movement and on-beat hip pops, was high art. My friends and I grew up watching compilation videos, practicing in front of mirrors, and gassing up each other's new moves. We would fully wild out when presented the opportunity to twerk for real at house parties or school dances. And it wasn't just us, you could spot kids who were ghost

silent in school throwin' it back after hours. While other dances like the Jerk, Cat Daddy, and Dougie were passing phases, twerking was a staple. So, imagine my surprise when at 15 I transferred to a high school in the neighboring city of East Lansing where no one seemed to know what twerking was. Blank faces stared back at me the first time I used the term at my new school. When I started to explain, my new peers interrupted me with "Oh you mean *grinding*?" Grinding? Hell nah. Grinding is something old heads do when a Marvin Gaye song comes on and they insist "You don't know nunn bout this." It's slow, and old, and intimate. Twerking is entirely different. I mean have none of them heard *Whistle While You Twurk*? The 2001 Ying Yang Twins joint that literally sampled a children's song from *Snow White* and turned it into an iconic booty poppin' anthem, they *did that*. Or *Booty Wurk* by T-Pain the living legend? This man said one cheek at a time and we heard him. What about *Check on It*? Dig it, pop it, TWERK it, stop it, this was pre-black power Beyoncé so I know they heard that one.

At the first dance I went to at East Lansing, I wanted to show my friends what I meant; what it meant to me to move my body expressively and confidently. So, I dropped it low and people around me stared wide eyed; I didn't make it through a full song before the dean of students grabbed me by the elbow and led me to a sectioned off corner of the cafeteria. "This," he told me, "is the timeout section. You can come out in fifteen minutes and try to dance appropriately. If I see you do that again you'll be sent home."

Fast-forward one year to 2013 and Miley Cyrus is fake twerking with Robin Thicke's crusty ass on the VMA's. Wonder Bread America goes nuts and we're inundated with off-beat stiff hips and no finesse. My classmates start wearing shirts that say "Twerk it." They can't get

enough of this shit. At the homecoming dance this year there is no timeout section; no one is jezelebeled for their sad version of twerking. And I'm... too tired to say I told y'all.

Things like this happened often in my new suburban-ish high school. I would say what I meant and my peers would attempt to translate into an ultimately less seasoned choice of language. Until the distinctly Black terms I used were sensationalized, they were not acknowledged; they were not words. This experience held true as I transitioned into higher education. At DePaul University, I continued to move through predominately white, upper/middle class spaces that I had little experience with growing up on the west side of Lansing.

The class-specific, Black speech pattern, heavy with Ebonics and slang, that my friends and I used growing up and continue to use amongst each other, is nearly invisible in the educational spaces we've occupied. It's ignored, or minimized, or simplified. When it does exist it in the realm of education it is often lacking in the complexity that we bring to it. I remember a high school English class where our copies of Romeo and Juliet had footnotes that translated Shakespearian into weak ass slang that the teacher thought we might be able to relate to more, calling the double suicide at the end "real gangsta." Ha.

Ebonics cannot be simply defined. Just like twerking, just like my hometown, just like the experiences and stories my friends and I hold. Language and methods of speech are dynamic; they do not fit into the binary of either proper or inappropriate that is all too common in the realm of secondary and private education. This simplicity attributed to Ebonics and the true lack of representation marginalizes working-class, students of color in these settings. To

not conform is to position oneself as unfit to occupy these spaces. Use of Ebonics aligns students of color with being less intelligent or less academically capable. I live this experience, I hear it from my friends, I see it attributed to my community and yes, I'm mad but... so what? Well: what if I was allowed to express myself in academia in ways that aligned with what I really meant or felt? What if under-resourced communities of color like mine were offered more realistic representations of themselves rather than simplified versions that coincide with white-washed educational structures? Would more of us succeed academically? Make it out the hood? Produce our own manifestos that inhibited erasure and attribute more accurate complexity to how we speak and what that means to us? Disenfranchise colonialism? Make white folks nervous? Hell yeah.

So, let's disidentify. This cat José Muñoz, a former NYU professor of performance studies, and the originator of disidentification theory was on the same wave of being frustrated with simplified minority representation. His theory focuses specifically on the marginalized identities of queer individuals of color. Muñoz's book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* addresses the heavy white washing of queer identity that achieved some representation in mainstream culture in the 90's, while the queer Poc experience was largely absent or erased from that representation. Muñoz describes disidentifiaction as performance or art that "for the minority subject is a mode of recycling or reforming an object that has already been invested with powerful energy" (Muñoz 94). Muñoz offers artist Jean-Michel Basquiat as an example, combining established, popular, pop-art style work with graffiti style work that was condemned in the high art sphere. Basquiat, a brotha from Brooklyn,

repurposed something in his paintings by taking a powerful stereotype and flipping it into truth. He showed its complexity. He showed *his* complexity (Muñoz, 952).

Muñoz asserts that disidentification is not only a recycling but also a “survival strategy” to “navigate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes subjects” (Muñoz, 283). There is not a complete rejection of negative stereotypes of commonly held conceptions, but there is also not total acceptance in this artistic method. Disidentification is a nuanced tug-of-war; it involves playing into common concepts around the subject’s marginalized identity, as well as contradicting them, and also exposing new features and truths. *Survival*, he says survival. The use of this theory in the context of Ebonics, to add complexity and representation to what spaces of higher education so often elide, is how it will survive.

It’s important to address the fact that Muñoz’s book is old... damn near as old as me with a publication date of 1999. Is it dated in places? Absolutely. A few times Muñoz calls out rap music, like all of rap music, as a negative force. At one point, he uses the term “thug” to describe someone violent which is a word I have been conditioned to associate with being synonymous with someone specifically black, and evil; a word that’s nearly always used with racial, anti-Black undercurrents. But also; dude is dead. He died young at 46 in 2013, and his 1999 theory was honestly ahead of its time (NYT). I mean, everything from 1999 was a little bit problematic and his work isn’t flagrant on that scale. Of course, I can’t say for sure, but I like to think if he were still alive he’d be doing some kickass intersectional shit. And in any case, his use of the word thug gave me another term to disidentify...

Chapter I. Coda

The following works *Ebonics (Part I)* and *Nothing Personal*, utilize disidentification theory and an Ebonics heavy dialect to explore truth and complexity about my relationship with where I'm from. In short, two love letters to my hood:

Ebonics (Part 1)

That's ghetto.

No no no no. I mean that's *Ghetto* with a capital G. Not that lower-case way *you* say it. When you say it, it sounds dirty and scary and sharp like a bus stop steak knife like:

W o a h

that doesn't belong here, wonder how it got here, wonder what it's been through, definitely do not pick it up, matter fact stop looking at it it's...

ghetto.

That's how *you* say ghetto.

Me, I'm a capital G queen

I say it clean like my edges laid by God herself

I say it **sweet** like kool-aid (not *your* kool-aid, *your* kool-aid tastes like dish water)



I say it **sour** like lemon salt we save our quarters for at the corner store

They both make my mouth pucker,

I taste both in the back of my throat they, make me droooooool

Ghetto is:

That hoodrich feeling after you get your check and before rent is due

Parlaying the roach weed to a blunt

Windows down in the hoopty bumping THAT thing THAT thing THAT tHiiiiIIiiiiinnnnGGggg, bless Ms. Lauryn Hill

Weave so long is swishes around your ass

Weave so bright they see you coming from

D

O

W

N

the block like

who *is* she.

My Ghetto is rhythm

It sways and bops in time with bare feet on concrete, and double-dutch, and thick lips, and thick hips, it two steps even on the hard days and we're never short on hard days.

I say it loud from a big mouth

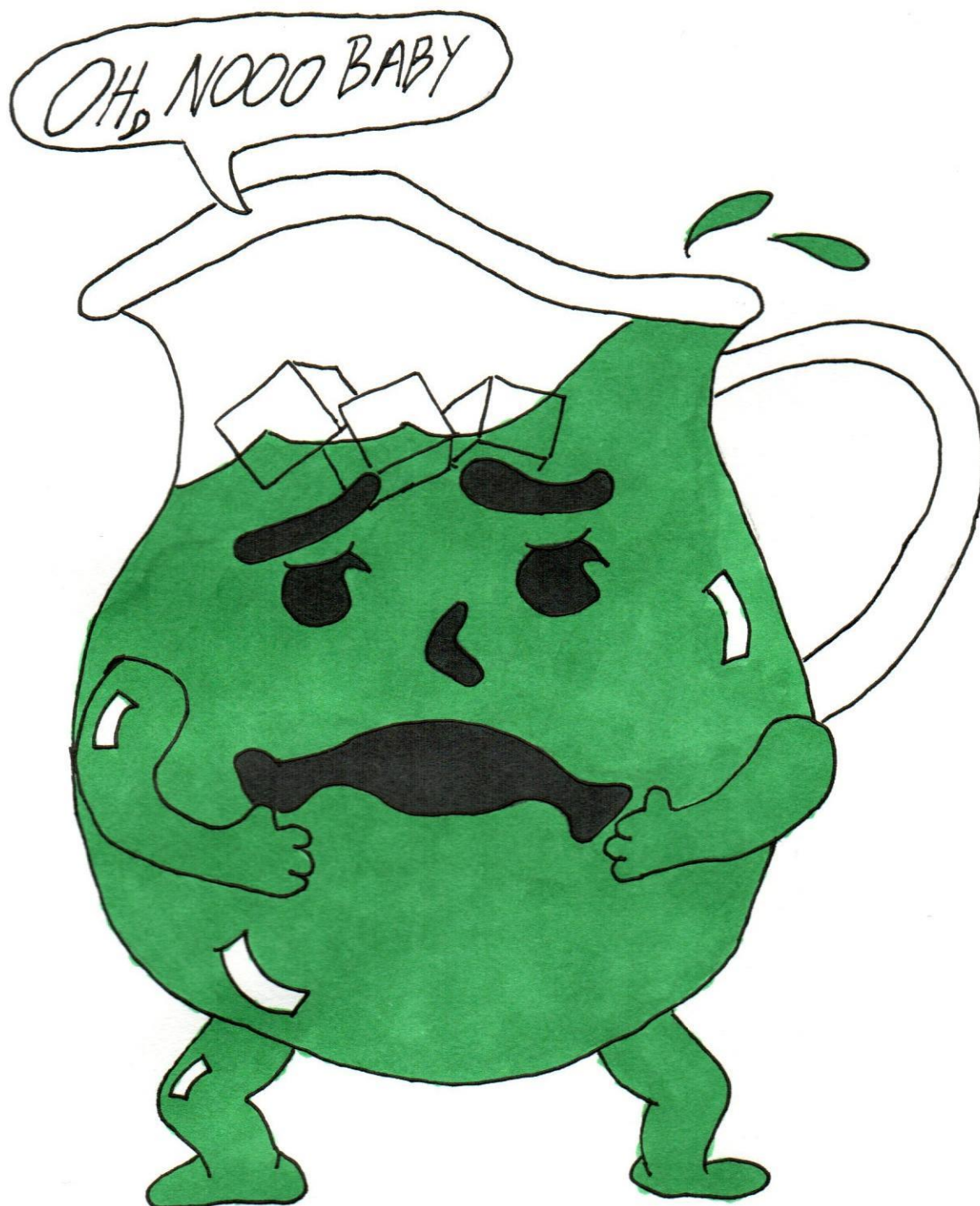
I say it loud, I'm reclaiming words

I'm reclaiming space

I'm on the North Side with my dubs up screaming

LONG LIVE THE WEST SIDE

They taught me everything good about Ghetto.



Nothing Personal

My Mom Has Short Hair

The chain-link fence is the only thing separating my backyard from Dean's. In elementary school, when it's not cool for girls to be friends with boys, we're afterschool, trampoline friends. My yard is a mess of roots, dirt patches and dog poop, but Dean's yard is smooth emerald-green. I clamor over the fence and run in bare feet across fresh clipped grass, the wet pulp coating my toes. His white, two-story home looms over me with open windows and blue shutters. I reach the back stoop, knock on the door and singsong: *Is Deeeean hooome?*

We meet on the tattered trampoline. Dean's house is the best; there are no bedtimes, or *be careful's*, or popsicle limits. We practice backflips and torture beetles on the black mesh. Dean crawls underneath and I hop up and down with all my might, trying to land where I think he is.

Sometimes Dean's mom Renee comes to the stoop to watch us jump. Renee is not like my mother. Renee's brown hair is so long it swishes around her butt when she walks. She wears white wife-beaters and always has a Newport sticking out of her mouth. Her legs are long and tan and she walks across the spiky lawn in bare feet like we do. Renee wears dark eyeliner even when she's got a black eye, which was a lot of the time until she and Dean's dad split up. Renee lets me call her by her first name; Renee still lives in her father's house; Renee is young and pregnant and alone when Dean and I are afterschool-trampoline-friends.

Actually, She Did Tell My Parents

Tonight is cavity sweet. We parlayed pocket change to buy neon colored Mystics, sour gummy worms, and peach rings to take back to Dean's house. Our grubby, sticky fingers talk so we don't have to; they pass and reach and snap impatiently for snacks and smokes in the T.V. lit basement. Dean, Young and I are pressed thigh to thigh on the dusty futon in our normal positions: knees wide, backs hunched, taking turns rolling blunt wraps. The earthy scent of cheap incense, mildew, and smoke keeps me warm and lightheaded. The wall to our right is tacked with trophies from Dean's futon conquests: a tan DDD bra, one silver hoop earring, pink lace panties, and a metallic wallpaper of Magnum wrappers. In the corner is the studio; a microphone shrouded by dingy hanging towels and insulated with egg cartons. Johnny Cash flips his middle finger at us from the poster stuck to the door, surrounded by piles of wilted laundry, but we don't mind. We're sixteen, it's winter break, and we're trying to see how many times we can watch Pineapple Express and how many Swisher Sweet wrappers we can collect before the two frozen weeks are up.

The front door slams upstairs and the three of us stare at each other, mouths agape with half chewed hot fries. No one was supposed to be home tonight. There's a thunder of staggering footsteps and Young is already boosting me out the narrow basement window when Renee bursts in.

Dean, you little shit!

A waft of booze follows her as our smoke clouds rush out the open door. Young and I freeze.

S.J... get down hon. You know I'm not gunna tell your parents.

Renee sighs and we collapse onto the floor. We wait, tense for her next move. She stumbles towards Dean and leans on him for support.

Son, she says, if you're gunna keep doing this shit, could you at least try to get good grades?

Why can't you be more like S.J.?

She giggles and reaches her hand out for the bag of hot fries.

That Was My First Kiss

I'm quiet quiet quiet inside, tip toes, past my parent's bedroom, two sleeping bears, sloooooowly down the steps, hold breath, creep through the dining room, then kitchen, don't wake up the dog, living room, back door shhh's open, back door shhh's closed, I'm on the deck and SPRINTAWAYFROMTHEHOUSE, skip the steps in one flying bound, hit the grass already running, running, running, watch out for dog poop, tree stumps, tennis balls, shallow holes, watch out, watch out, make it to the chain link fence and sail over in one stag's leap, land on two feet...

Hey

I pant at the base of our meeting tree in Dean's backyard.

Took you long enough.

Dean sparks a skinny, crooked joint; we're fourteen and don't know how to roll yet. He takes a deep drag then holds it up to my lips. I go to grab it but he shakes his head.

What the hell, man? Don't be weird.

He shrugs.

It's this full moon, I guess. Makes me a little... crazy.

He makes his eyes wide with the last word and cackles theatrically, then throws his head back and begins to howl.

Before I can shush him, my dog picks up the howl from inside the house. The light flicks on in my parent's bedroom and a sleepy silhouette moves past the window. I have to get back, I take off, I'm over the fence and...

I'm not over the fence. Dean catches my elbow before I can leap and we both lose our balance and tumble to the damp ground. I work to untangle myself from him but he grabs my chin in the dark space between our homes and presses our mouths together hard, slipping me the tip of his slimy tongue. When we part, my face is twisted into a question. He pulls his baseball cap down over his eyes. I shove him fiercely then I'm over the fence. Running, running, running, dodging dog poop, tree stumps, tennis balls, shallow holes, onto the deck, shhh open the back door, shhh close the back door, the dog is awake, the dog is barking and

Hi mom.

Chapter II. Can I Get uhhhhh Linguist?

What about a definition for Ebonics? Let's start from the beginning. This cat Robert Williams (Washington University) coined the term in 1975 as a combination of ebony and phonics. His definition for the term was "the linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendent of African origin. It includes the grammar, various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of Black people" (Baugh, 15). It's important to note that big homie was a psychologist, not a linguist, so he didn't kill it with the language specificity of this definition. Some important things are left up for interpretation, like the meaning of those regions.

Linguistics Professor of Washington University in St. Louis, John Baugh, authored the book *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice*, where he points out the fact that this definition doesn't reconcile the fact that dialects of Black folks from all the encompassed regions, brought to different parts of the world would of course be different (Baugh, 22). So, Williams was loose with terminology and specificity but in any case, the word Ebonics was a hit.

Fast forward to Oakland, California in 1996; this is where the term Ebonics started getting major attention on a global level. In the process of working to address the learning deficit students of color faced, the Oakland school board declared Ebonics as the native "language" of the Black youth in their school district (Baugh, 37). Native language. A whole ass language, entirely separate from the English language... A major goal in this word choice, "language," is to procure more government funding to be allocated to the learning of black

students. That money has to come from somewhere, and the school board thinks this can be achieved by tapping into English as a second language for government funding (Baugh, 37). But this is not purely a scam to get some dough for an under-resourced Black community, no no. It comes with the full intention to use English as a second language pedagogy to teach Black folks *how to speak English*. English! And here we were this whole time not knowing we were bilingual (add that to ya resumes brothas and sistas).

The grand plan is to utilize teachers that already have the lingo down and train the teachers who don't. If this as a concept wasn't problematic enough, now you got all your white English teachers coming in tryna chop it up, talking about how Willy Shake was an O.G. The potential roast sessions... my god. It was clear these folks have made some big, bad decisions on language. But as for the school board? Not a linguist in sight. Are these muthafuckas endangered? They couldn't find one expert on language to offer any professional language insights? Bet.

Following Oakland school board's decision, a shit storm starts raging, but not an entirely polarized one. People of all racial makeups align with both sides of the controversy. There are black and white folks who agree with the ruling as a means to procure more government funding for under-resourced black communities. There are Black and white folks who reject Ebonics and want it kept out of educational spaces for a number of different reasons, be they white supremacy or Black elitism. There are actual English as second language learners concerned about the potential depletion of their language resources. There are politicians worried that legitimizing this effort and providing funding will open the government up to funding countless other communities in the same positions. There are linguists who think it's

absurd the black dialect Ebonics has been dubbed an entirely new language. There's also black folks, white folks, ESL learners, politicians, and linguists who really don't give a fuck (Baugh, Ch. 4).

What happens next gets a little bit sticky. The Oakland school board makes some revisions to their original policy statement. They want to backpedal the idea that Ebonics is a language separate from English, and they do this by repositioning the policy to say, "Ebonics is not *merely* a dialect of English" (Baugh, 44). They eliminate word choice that asserts Ebonics as a language outside of English but do not amend the proposed execution or source of funding. Ultimately, the damage is done. The school district's appeal doesn't achieve any legitimate, governmental footing and Ebonics is further black-balled from public educational spaces.

The Oakland school district had an opportunity and fumbled it in an impressively sloppy way. From what I can tell, their most notable achievement was giving the American public Ebonics as a tangible term to demonize the way Black folks speak. The original intention to create equal opportunity and gain more resources for Black public education was ironically shaded by inappropriate language. Shit was bogus. And you're looking for an *actual* linguists' take on the topic, Baugh writes in his book of English and Ebonics that "the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each are educationally significant but insufficient to justify classification as a language other than English" (Baugh, 47). And that's that on that.

Chapter II. Coda

The next couple works examines how perspective shifts, contorts and inverts as time goes on. The series style of both of the following pieces features a timeline of how the same terms and locations can take on entirely new meanings with the passage of time, while still remaining prevalent. Perspective is fluid, time is wild, check it out.

Park Meadows

I.

I'm ego deep in the false turquoise of a neighborhood pool.
Not my neighborhood, but only one street and a wall
of property taxes away. The friend I came with looks off
when mermaid mean girls say I'm from the wrong side of
the street. Holy water, I pull myself onto hot concrete, humble.

II.

I climb chain link fences with gecko grip. Crouch at the top and throw
my towel down first, then follow hard on the balls of my feet. I am lean muscles, tight
and ready to scurry back if the maintenance man is there. But today I land alone, so I
slip in and let the water hold the small of my back until the fence rattles. My wrong-
side friends wave cherry slurpees: entrance fees. I unlock the door and slouch on the
water's edge, sucking sweat, red no. 3 dye, and chlorine from my fingertips. This is
rich.

III.

Moonlight throws my face back at me in dark water. The rest of my body must have
come off with my pajamas on the concrete. I never learned how to dive and it's been
keeping me up, water logged insomniac with unfinished business. The cicadas hold
their breath when I submerge. I must be somewhere down here.

Ebonics Part II

11 years old and my momma's a hustlaaaa
Like everyone in my class is 2008 broke but she makes sure I'll never be the most hated
Most hatred for the kids with dirty fingernails and cheeks
Most hatred for the kids who aren't frontin'
We're all deep down dirty but
My peers got new J's funded by unemployment and child support and
I could get free lunch but instead my momma made me butter and bread sandwiches
They taste like pride

16 years old and I only fuck with hustlaaaas
Like all my boyfriends move weight out of hoopties
All my boyfriends admire thugged out daddy's they don't know
Only inheritance was transience, these dudes come just so they can go
Broke boys can't break my heart this year, that costs money

18 years old and I think I'm a hustlaaaa
Like I'm most likely to sell you mids then ghost you, no refund policy
Not a new phone, just a new attitude got me asking 'who dis' everytime you hit my line
Least likely to save a number, least likely to tell the truth when I get hit with a:
Where are you right now?

21 years old and I know I'm a hustlaaaa
Like I steady hold down 4 jobs, like it took me four years to graduate
Like sometimes I have to roll up my quarters to pay rent but I always make it and
I try hard to only lie and steal and cheat when I get scared,
Reformation feels like moving from shade to sunlight, targets always shifting, I stay in at night



For-A-Black-Girl

At 16 I spread loyalty thick like Jam over baby hairs. It sticks under my fingernails and stains ripped jeans. This is the summer we become late night friends because you prefer my winter skin. I molt my August husk on an oak next to cicadas and creep through the heat like a shadow. I disappear at high noon and surface with the sunset, moving west towards your parent's house.

I'm here. Back door shawty, wearing light-skinned moonlight over apologetic melanin while I wait for that *come in* text. Your parents are Ambien dead to this hour of night, but you take your time opening white gates to me. I change into muted TV glow in your basement and let your hands cover my darker shades.

Loyalty lead me here to chew tracks into your thin lips. I'm sated by the taste of iron and the thought of you explaining away a bloody mouth to your mother. I collect compliments whispered in confidence that wither with the clause: *for-a-black-girl*. You touch me common, in handfuls of wet brown earth and throw me back to dewy grass at the threat of dawn.

I'm posted in your front lawn, legs sprawled, dodging the morning paper. Summer's almost over and I'm sick of skipping sunrises. Your suburban trinity shakes fists at my back from the front porch; Ma in the bathrobe, Pa scratching at boxers, and you with the red face. The sun crowns and I flex arms of amber and gold, my earth tones drip sweet like coffee and caramel. You had hoped I wouldn't find this kind of shine.

Interlude

Juugin: To Juug

I cannot tell you the etymology of juugin. I looked into it. Merriam Webster doesn't have shit to say on the topic. Urban Dictionary has a few attempts, but damn near all the definitions in that resource sound like they're written by white dudes named Chad who heard new words from their favorite rapper, got excited and thought they figured it out (they're the ones who sing along to every word, n**** included).

I did not expect to find a scholarly article that cited its Latin roots, I just wanted to see what was out there on the topic. Typically, when I'm speaking with someone who is not well versed in Ebonics, I code switch. This is a huge time saver in communication and I'm proficient enough that it rarely trips me up. Transitioning from the west side of Lansing to the cosmopolitan yuppie wound that is Lincoln Park, I've had plenty of practice. I make fairly uncomplicated changes by substituting words and phrases here and there such as:

"Waddup slim" → "Hello friend"

"Big bet" → "Sounds good"

"I'm t'd up!" → "I'm so excited!"

Equivalent exchange. I switch up and save myself some trouble. I'm only given pause when I reach a term without an adequate substitution: which brings me back to juugin. The last time I was back in the L, I had fully assimilated, as I do, to my west side lingo. A friend of mine from East Lansing, distinctly whiter, squarer, and richer than the rest of my squad (a true Chad) joined us all to kick it one night. We were having a standard roast session of folks we all knew and I mentioned a local who was "juuggin for rent money."

My woadies laugh, my Chad asks “She’s *what?*” And everyone looks to me. Hmm. I rack my brain for an equivalent but can’t come up with anything concise. The homies try to help me and we’ll all throwing out fragmented definitions

“Juuggin is like trappin but it’s different”

“Kinda like hustlin but...”

“Like it can include movin’ weight and...”

“Juugin’s about come-ups”

We have stumbled upon a term we can’t code switch. I’m mad because we can’t explain and I’m mad because we have to. I’m mad that my Chad can’t just use context clues and intonation to dig what I’m sayin. He doesn’t know this word because why would he ever have to? He’s not juggin and neither is anyone in his circle... and this is where the misplaced contention in Ebonics comes in. Lack of cultural context and understanding from Ebonics outsiders leads to simplifying the dialect as slang that isn’t legitimate in effective communication.

Assuming that Kanye is wrong and slavery was not in fact a choice, the cultural effect of slavery on Black American language should not be overlooked. John Baugh notes that “American slave descendants have blended more slowly into the melting pot” than white immigrants. Much of this slow melt in terms of language can be attributed to systemic racism that marginalizes Black folks and prohibits access to the “Standard English” that is so emphasized in spaces of education. From slave plots to projects the resources needed to master this standard are repeatedly denied by those who demonize our communities for “non-standard” speech. The language that is born from compromised situations (i.e. juuggin) are

necessary tools of communication to fill in the cultural gaps that standard English doesn't account for. Enslave, incarcerate, withhold funds, limit access to resources *and* expect us to not find language for those experiences? Please.

To understand juugin, it is important to remind ourselves that we are working in a dialect with largely oral etymologies. The transatlantic uncertainty of origin permeates Black American culture in ancestry and language. I'm not sure who gave my family their last name and I'm not sure where juugin came from, but that doesn't make the tangibility of me or the word any lesser. It's the same people generationally forcing Black folks to keep score through an oral history; whether they're stealing brothas from the motherland, depriving us of the resources needed to adequately document our history ourselves, or demonizing our dialect as so illegitimate it can't exist freely in standardized spaces of education.

Anyways, as for juugin, I did my best:

Juugin

/juh- gīn/

adjective

To juug. To participate in illegal activity as a means of making money one requires for necessities; leveraging or taking advantage of individuals or situations to make money.

Origin

Bitch who knows

Also see:

Scammin, hustlin, hittin licks, come-ups

Chapter III. Take it to the Classroom

So now we know a little bit about how we got here, but what about where we go now? Let's bring disidentification back into the picture. Ebonics is a topic that has been demonized, misrepresented, and stifled in the public sphere since it's great debut; sound like grounds for disidentification? I think so. By aligning with, rebelling against, and creating new commonly held views and conceptions of Ebonics, individuals who identify with the dialogue can begin to reclaim the narrative. Enter the public sphere of education: This reclamation should be *for* the people not just *about* the people which happens to be the case so often when marginalized groups are the topic of study. To achieve this accessibility is key; the Ebonics educational environment should be just as available to underfunded public high schools as it is to students of color in private higher-educational settings. More so, representation and reclamation are equally as important for Black people on all spectra of education.

The following lesson plans are meant for creating and maintaining Black spaces in education where Black people can story share, reflect, and create based on the Ebonics dialect. These lessons are meant to be facilitated in peace circle form with all participants on the same level to emphasize community equity and acknowledge each community member's importance. The lessons are written with youth in mind, but old heads are welcomed too (and might even find some joints from their day to rock with). The following three segmented lessons represent key topics that Ebonics education could highlight, including Black women and beauty standards, regional dialect, and ambiguous slurs.

Queen's English

This is NOT a boys-only game. Not even close. The goal of this segment is to examine Ebonics though and in relation to womanhood. The work of several O.G. queens including Toni Morrison and Bell Hooks will be explored to help contextualize group discussion and analysis of the lens. Group discussions, writing prompts, and visual elements will be utilized to guide students in recognizing the how Ebonics relates to Black womanhood and beauty standards.

Lesson Plan

Key Words: Nappy, Light-skinned, Dark-skinned, Thick

Reading List: The Bluest Eye – Toni Morrison

Happy to be Nappy – bell hooks

Opening Activity:

Journal prompt – What are some words/ terms used to describe the appearances of Black women? Where do you usually hear these words? Do you use them?

Core Activity:

Group Discussion – The Bluest Eye commentary on beauty standards

Use the quote list below to lead a discussion about beauty standards Black women face in America and terms used to explain that experience. Read a quote and pose the questions that follow the quotes to the class.

"This disrupter of seasons was a new girl in school named Maureen Peal. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me."

- What does "high-yellow" mean to you? What are some connotations of this term?
- How does Maureen having long hair contribute to this narrative?

"They hold their behind in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair."

- Do you think beauty standards today still coincide with viewing these qualities as negative overall? What about for Black women specifically?
- How/ where are these attributes commodified today?

"Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign - all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. 'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it.'"

- Where do you see this type of *language* (blue-eyed, yellow-haired) used to described societal beauty norms?

Closing Activity: Read bell hooks' *Happy to be Nappy* aloud to the class

Coast to Coast

This segment will honor the importance of oral history that Ebonics preserves and extends by encouraging students to partake in personal story sharing. The regional differences of Ebonics as a Black American dialect will be examined by calling on the shared knowledge, wisdom, and life experience of the class. The diasporas experienced will be shared together in order to uncover underlying commonalities and differences of regional Ebonics and what it means to the dialect as a whole in America. Music by Black rappers from the East Coast, West Coast, South, and Midwest will be featured as a basis for dissecting regional Ebonics.

Lesson Plan

Key Words: Hyphy, Ghost Ride, Jiggy, Beef, Buck, Crunk, Tweakin', Fufu, Fugazi, Fifi

Opening Activity

Journal Prompt – What is a favorite term you use that is specific to your region? What does it mean to you? How do you use it?

Core Activity

Print out the lyrics to the following songs (or chose your own regionally relevant songs) and invite students to highlight Ebonics terms they are either familiar or unfamiliar with while you play the songs individually. Let students know which region in the country each song is from and the regional terms employed in the song. For any unknown terms draw upon literary analysis of lyrics, context clues, and community knowledge.

West Coast:

Tell Me When To Go – E-40

Regional terms: Hyphy, Ghost ride the whip

East Coast:

Hard Knock Life Jay Z

Regional Terms: Jiggy, Beef

Southern U.S.:

Knuck if You Buck – Crime Mob

Regional Terms: Buck, Crunk

Midwest:

Feel That – Vic Mensa

Regional Terms: Tweakin, Fufu, Fugazi, Fifi

Closing Activity

Group discussion – Do you see any of the words examined relevant to your region even if they don't originate from your region? What factors mobilize these words?

Profilin'

We're not the only ones using this language. This segment will address the internal and external harm caused by community outsiders utilizing Ebonics terms in negative ways that differs from how folks who identify with Ebonics use them. The connotations of words based on who say them and how will be examined. Students will have the opportunity to disidentify with words commonly used to demonize Black individuals and reclaim their own definitions.

Lesson Plan

Key Words: Thug, Ratchet, Ghetto, Hoodrat, Sketchy

Opening Activity:

Journal Prompt – Write the terms: Ratchet, Ghetto, Thug, Hoodrat, and Sketchy in a place where everyone can see them such as a blackboard. Invite students to journal about a time they have heard themselves or their community referred to using one of those words. What

was the situation? How did it feel? Offer space for anyone to share their reflection with the class if they feel called to.

Core Activity:

Group Discussion – Thug CNN Video Clip

Play the “Carl Stokes Versus Erin Burnett” video from YouTube for the class

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lp3vrf6Ssc>)

Contextualize the video by giving a brief history of the 2015 Baltimore Protests in response to the lack of justice in the case of Freddie Gray’s murder at the hand of law enforcement. To encourage the sharing of knowledge and wisdom, encourage anyone to add what they know about the protests. Invite students to share their initial thoughts of the video. Guide a discussion with these questions:

- What are your thoughts on what Carl Stokes is saying? Do you agree? Disagree?
- How do you feel when someone refers to you or your community using the word thug? Is it different if it’s a white person rather than a person of color?
- Do you use “thug” and any of the other words written on the board in a different way than mainstream news media might? What do they mean when you use them.
- What are some other words that have a disconnect between how you use them and how outsiders use them? (Add words to the board)

Closing Activity:

Writing Assignment – De-Weaponized Words

Invite students to choose one of the words on the board and write a definition that honors how they use the word rather than how it's used for demonizing.

Chapter IV.

That's... It

This has been an exercise in reclamation and representation. A way to attribute complexity and dismantle stereotypes of Ebonics and where it belongs. However, it is important to address that it is not all reclamation and empowerment; there is a deep, internal community brokenness that needs to be examined. As a dialect that so often is contextualized by systemic oppression and a lack of resources, Ebonics encompasses terms of hatred and prejudice. The conversation about Ebonics must include accountability for harm caused to be a complete conversation. It's 2018 and I still hear language rooted in homophobia and transphobia used in Black media and in my hood. It's 2018 and I still hear people from my community use language that dehumanizes women. Dialect informs and is informed by culture; by addressing the poison existent in dialect we can begin to mitigate that poison from our culture.

As I write this it's the last quarter of my last year of undergrad – not being certain how to end things is a permeating theme. In this case, I feel like it is comfortably fitting: an uncertain ending for a project rooted in the fluidity, uncertainty, and non-classifiable dialect that is Ebonics. This project is dedicated to the younger versions of me, navigating what it meant to “talk proper.” I'm still not entirely sure... and that's okay. Disidentifying is about adding truth and complexity to marginalized identities. Looking at this nearly finished product, I'm feeling true and complex. It's possible I always have been.

Epilogue

Hood Defector

In the middle of Michigan, between the state's capitol building and the crumbling General Motors plant, Mari, Rye, and I come up together. The plant closes when we're still young and we watch our city turn grey with abandoned houses and unemployment. Formerly thriving storefronts clutter with pawnshops, dollar stores, and smoke shops while the streets of Lansing decay. The three of us pull each other up to 18 and move out of our mothers' houses to Butler Street.

The Butler Street stoop was a hood throne. The I-need-to-smoke-something destination was decorated with blunt guts and lipstick-stained Newports. Each step felt soft with ash over cracked cement. Summer smelled sweet like fat trash bags and sticky beer cans. The best part was the view. You could see the whole street and all it's folks from that stoop. There were Tony, serving dope to skeleton customers from his front porch, babymommas pulling little brown kids, babydaddies pulling big black pit bulls, Thursday night fireworks from the baseball field, and stray cat families multiplying. In the middle of it was me, Rye and Mari, pressed together outside, sweating or shaking, working our lungs.

If someone asks who got em', say I got em'. I quit my job last month and got to 34cheming. Britt works at one of the dispensaries on Kalamazoo; she trims plants in the nursery and they let her take home gallon bags of shake everyday for free. So she's been on her bruja grind, making vats of canna-oil to cook all her vegan food. She gave me a jar full, talking about "it's organic" as if I wasn't about to mix it into synthesized Meijer brand brownie batter. Since then, the kitchen has smelled like sweet, chocolaty skunk. I wrap each brownie into a

cellophane covered brown gem, spread them on the kitchen counter and tell everyone: I got em', I got em', I got em'. The screen door whines open and closed, the only respite when my supply runs dry.

Stoner teens stumble in and out of the white tiled kitchen, reaching for the only thing in the fridge and tossing crumpled bills on the table. I stay planted on the living room couch, watching them come and go between mouthfuls of the dirt-textured goods. It's simple hood economics that you shouldn't touch your own stash but I'm turning a profit fat enough to never come down. I wonder hazily if Tony knows there's a baked goods dealer next door, serving a younger, fleshier clientele. I wonder if in ten years they'll be in his kitchen instead, preserving Lansing as the Heroin capitol of Michigan.

By the grace of Me, Ol' Dude moved into purgatory; the tight space between Mari's bedroom and the bathroom. The mattress taking up half of the room hosts fleeting tenants. Before his time there was Sam who kissed Rye's boyfriend, Laciee who painted with her blood, and Cierra who got knocked up. Then Ol' Dude. When I asked if he could move in, Mari kept her lips closed tight around reminders of me promising to quit him.

Lately, Ol Dude's been leaving the block to waste time with stringy hair, narrow hips, and pink nipples. At night he goes to sorority houses on the eastside to get his vanilla-bitch fix. I stay put in his bed, waiting in amphetamine anticipation for him to come back. . I have a self-written script for the loose Adderall I find around his room. 'Rail one IR every hour til Ol' Dude returns. Take without food. Grind teeth. Listen to heartbeat.'

I stretch long on the mattress with all the tedium of a housecat and listen for footstep on creaky wood. These are the nights that I'm embarrassed to smell like coconut oil and secondhand smoke. I yank fistfuls of kinky hair into a ponytail, trying to will it straight. While I wait, I turn conversations in my head: me telling him he's not shit, telling him he's not slick, telling him he hurt me. Him saying that he's sorry, saying that he's changing, saying that he loves me. But he keeps me waiting until my blood cools and I'm too numb to fight. When he gets home I pull his wet forehead to my chest in surrender and we synchronize; two insomniacs slipping against each other, waiting for the sun to tell us it's safe to sleep again.



Make no mistake; I'm well versed in the merits of Hennessey. A pint of Henny will have you feeling more hoodrich than a Chingy video. Walking into the function with a bottle of Henny sends the classic "Look at how much fun I'm having you broke bitches, ha ha ha, you probably drink King Cobra" message. Yes it's true; you'll never lose flexing Hennessey. But hear me out about the new wave; I'm talking Pink Moscato. Yellow Tail, Barefoot, Shutter Home, doesn't matter as long as it's cheap.

Now hold up a second, cus' I can tell I'm losing some of you here... Don't think the Pink Moscato slander has fallen on deaf ears. I've heard it dubbed Thot Juice; I've felt the sting of the label *basic bitch* from Henny holding haters. This is fake news! Pink Moscato is introvert antidote! It's shoot-your-shot serum! Take it from a card-carrying recluse; Pink Moscato is a surefire way to subdue that pesky, debilitating social anxiety you feel in a room full of people. Nothing will have you throwing it back on the dance floor in a way that evokes quite as many "who is she"s than that pink gold. Moscato guarantees your night at least three new best-friends-for-life-until-we're-sober, a minimum of two phone numbers, and the painful envy of every wallflower watching you table dance. Say what you will about Hennessey, I'll be off this Pink Moscato.

We're in Mari's hoopty, parked in the driveway out front. I'm pressed because I was supposed to keep the cat, but between the maintenance men and us moving boxes, she must have slipped out. Earlier, we searched the basement, the yard and all the vents. I thought when we all got here that we'd go on a reconnaissance mission and find that little shit so we could leave heroes. Really, it was just me, Rye, and Mari lumbering around swatting at mosquitoes.

Now, in the car, the air is damp and heavy and my eyes sting with sweat. Fuck the cat. From the passenger seat of the Malibu, the place doesn't look like much of anything. The picket fence peels around a weedy garden. Grass tangles over the brick path and our last trash bags perch on the steps. A flat, white-paneled face protrudes the stoop at us indifferently. It looks offensively impersonal, like just another trap house/ foster home/ halfway house on the block.

I know the window we broke on New Years is still broken, and my ex's name is tagged on the living room wall, and there are glow-in-the-dark stars tacked to Mari's ceiling, and it looks too small without furniture, and all three of our keys are on the kitchen counter. But I can't tell from here.

...

I'm a hood defector. A few years out and I'm still unsure if it's exile or escape. The term is "trappin" because it's a trap, I've seen that washing machine cycle drown my people. Here, in Chicago's Lincoln Park, white dudes with endless rent money invite me to their "trap" houses to party. That's a trap too. I'm twenty-one without a case or a kid and in my head is a crowd of faceless brown folks; they alternate between applause and condemnation.

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