#BlackLanguageMatters
FYSEM-UA634
Fall 2019
Professor Renee Blake (renee.blake@nyu.edu)

**Time and Place:** TH 4:55-7:25; 10 Washington Place, Rm 308

**Course Credit:** 4 Units

**Renée's Office Hours:** TH 2:30-4:30, 10 Washington Place, Rm 304 and by appt

**Course Description:**

This course is about language, specifically the myriad of ways that many African Americans express their personal and community identities. The course focuses primarily on the language variety known as African American English/African American Language, which often serves as a guise for deep-seated racial ideologies about African Americans and Black people more generally. In this course, students learn about the linguistic structure of African American Language and theories about its origins. We explore how language is used to convey social identity, particularly regarding race and ethnicity, and make meaning of one’s life. Issues addressed include language variation, language contact and change, language appropriation, in addition to social and linguistic discrimination. Finally, we consider African American Language as the nexus of ideas on race, identity, sexuality, violence and equality in the United States and globally, from James Baldwin in *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016), Ava Du Vernay’s *13th* (2016) and Ezra Edelman’s *OJ: Made in America* (2016) to Cornel West’s *Race Matters* (1993) and the more recent #BlackLivesMatter movement. (short course description)

This is a seminar-style course in which we connect the human condition of Black people in America to historical trajectories of forced and voluntary migrations of the Black or African Diaspora. The intellectual exploration of social being and language is through reading academic texts, listening to creative spoken and written word, as well as music, and engaging with digital media and collected sociolinguistic data. Students hone skills in the areas of critical thinking, constructive criticism, data analysis, social and linguistic analysis, and structuring arguments.

Students learn about African American English from a linguistic perspective and link it to current social, political and educational issues. Students have an opportunity to build writing and technological skills in fulfilling the course requirement that includes thinking and writing as public intellectuals within the digital humanities. A goal for the course is for students to engage in research, allowing for them to be creators of new knowledge about African Americans and language use in terms of production or perception, and to convey information to audiences in a matter that is accessible, or in other words, “keeps it real.”
Readings:
This course is interdisciplinary in nature and therefore, students read from several fields of inquiry. The reading for the course is generally 60-100 pages per week. This reading will consist of assigned reading as well as reading connected to doing original research. There are several weeks during which this course requires extensive linguistic training, data collection and analysis, with new and challenging concepts; during this time the reading will necessarily be light. In addition to articles, we read heavily from:


Other texts and readings will be provided on CLASSES

In addition to the reading are two films:
- 13th (2016)
- Talking Back in America (2017)
- Talking Back in America (2017)

Requirements and Grades:
By the end of the semester, students will have written at approximately 25 pages of text. This can include explicit writing assignments for which students are asked to react to a question, or written data analysis, or academic blogging.

Assignments (20% of grade): There are several assignments. Early in the semester there are 4 relatively short reaction papers worth 5% of the final grade each. (Writing equivalent=12 pages)

Reading Presentation: (10% of grade): Students present class readings and lead discussion (Writing equivalent=3 pages)

Data analysis (35% of grade): Students analyze African American English data of different varieties. There are 3 small data analysis assignments worth 5% of the final grade each and 2 larger assignments worth 10% each. (Writing equivalent=6 pages)

Exam (10% of grade): The objective of the exam is to ensure that students master basic concepts and principles.

Final Project (15% of grade): The goal is to disseminate good information about African American English to the public. Students produce written contributions that can be conceptual or content-driven. Paper length depends on whether students analyze data or
concepts about African American communication. We work on writing together throughout the semester. (Writing equivalent=5 pages)

Attendance/participation (10% of grade)

Plagiarism is not tolerated. Students are encouraged to reference NYU’s CAS statement on academic integrity (http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity)

**Disability Disclosure Statement:** Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
SYLLABUS (topics and readings)
African American English

Week 1/Sept. 5: Introduction; Class Orientation; Researching and Theorizing Black Language; N-word
Visitor: NYU Prison Education Program Student, Quintin Murray
Reading in Week 1:
Alexander (2010), Chapter 1 “The Rebirth of Caste” (40 pages)
Blake (2014) “African-American and Black as Demographic Codes” (16 pages)
Assignment: Prep Presentations

Week 2/Sept. 12: The State of Affairs of Black People in the USA I
Reading Presentations
FILM, in class: 13th (2016)
Reading in Week 2:
West (2017/2013) Race Matters (109 pages)
Assignment: Reaction Assignment 1: Due Week 4 (State of Affairs); Prep Presentations

Week 3/Sept. 19: The State of Affairs of Black People in the USA II- Lessons from Language
Reading Presentations
FILM, in class: PBS Special on Who Speaks American
Reading in Week 3:
Fitzpatrick (2011), Chapter 2 “Authorship” (38)
Baugh (2000) Chapters 1-3 (38 pages)
Smitherman (2001) Introduction (13 pages)
Assignment: Reaction Assignment 2: Due Week 5 (Sociolinguistics Autobiography)

Week 4/Sept. 26: Talking Black in America
FILM, in class: Talking Black in America
Reading in Week 4:
Rickford and Rickford (2000) Chapters 1-5 (88 pages)
Assignment: Prep Presentations

What the Hip Hop Generation has to say: From Michael Eric Dyson to Kendrick Lamar to Beyoncé
Making Sense of the N-Word from James Baldwin to Marc Lamont Hill to Bobby Shmurda to NAS to Dave Chappelle
Reading in Week 5:
Rickford and Rickford (2000), Chapter 6 (Vocabulary Section Only, Pages 91-98) (8 pages)
Assignment: Reaction Assignment 3: Due Week 6 (N-word)
Research: Class research (Research reading involved)
Week 6/Oct. 10: AAE Gone Viral (Research)
Visitor: Ra Carroll, 2019 Freshman Seminar, 2019-2020 Presidential Sophomore Scholar
Reading in Week 6:
Rickford and Rickford (2000), Chapter 6 (Pronunciation Section Only, Pages 98-108) (11 pages)
Assignment: Reaction/Research Assignment 4: Due Week 6 (N-word)
Research: Class research (Research reading involved)

Week 7/Oct. 17: African American Language and Language Theory (The Sound System)
   I. Language Variation
   II. What is Phonetics and Phonology?

Reading in Week 7:
Rickford and Rickford (2000), Chapter 7 (Grammar) (21 pages)
Data Assignment 1: Phonology
Research: Class research (Research reading involved)

Week 8/Oct. 24: AAE and Language Theory (Syntax or “Putting it all Together”)
Reading in Week 8:
TBA for class visitor in Week 9
Data Assignment 2: Phonology
Research: Class research (Research reading involved)

Week 9/Oct. 31: Still Breakin’ it Down: AAE Verbal System:
Visitor: Nicole Holliday, Assistant Professor, Pomona College
Learning about Tense and Aspect (A Wonderfully Complex System)
Reading in Week 9:
TBA for class visitor in Week 10
Data Assignment 3: Syntax
Research: Class research (Research reading involved)

Week 10/Nov. 7: AAVE Verbal System (continued)
Visitor: Simanique Moody, Assistant Professor, Brooklyn College, CUNY
All You Ever Wanted to Know about Aspectual Markers :-)  
Data Assignments: 4 (Phonology) & 5 (Syntax)

Week 11/Nov. 14: Language and Culture (The Oral Tradition)
Reading for Week 11:
Smitherman (2001): Chapters 11-13, 15 (73 pages)

Week 12/Nov. 21: EXAM
Work on Final Project
Reading in Weeks 12-13:
Smitherman (2001), Chapter 8 (23 pages)
Baugh (2000), Chapters 4, 8 (28 pages)
Rickford and Rickford (2000): Chapters 10-11 (31 pages)
Highly Encouraged Video to Watch: "The Language You Cry In"

Week 13/Nov. 28: NO CLASS

Week 14/Dec. 5: Linguistics, Education, and the Media; Connecting AAE to the Past
Linguistics and Education (The Oakland Ebonics Controversy and the Media)
FILM, in class: The Story of English--Black on White
Reading in Week 14:
Baugh (2000), Chapter 5-6 (25 pages)
Smitherman (2001), Chapter 16 (16 pages)
Rickford and Rickford (2000), Chapter 12 (11 pages)
(and other vernacular speakers) in the courtroom and beyond: (42 pages)

Week 15/ Dec. 12: The Politics of Language
Visitor: Taylor Jones, Graduate Student, University of Pennsylvania

FINAL PROJECTS DUE DECEMBER 17