

NORMALIZING “BLACK ENGLISH” IS RACIST

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Liberals love to congratulate themselves for rejecting racism, charging conservatives for tolerating, if not abetting, racism. Yet the policies they favor—opposing school choice, relativizing marriage, dumbing down education standards, defending miscreant behavior—are racist in effect, if not in intent. It is not red-neck racist jokes that blacks need to fear—it is the policy agenda of their liberal “allies” they need to be wary of.

The latest example of this is the push to normalize “Black English” in California. The goal of Black Californians United for Early Care & Education (BlackECE) is to challenge “harmful language hierarchies and affirm Black English as a legitimate, rule-governed language rooted in Black history, culture, and community.” It offers as an example of “Black English” such words as “she be working” and “they happy.”

It has long been observed that various racial and ethnic groups have a dialect that differ in some ways from conventional English. There is nothing controversial about that, but it is not only controversial to reject the very idea of “conventional English”—it is downright subversive of academic achievement to insist that “unconventional English” should be legitimatized.

Notice how those who support “Black English” talk about “harmful language hierarchies.” But there is nothing “harmful” about “language hierarchies.” They exist, and with good reason: they facilitate assimilation, making it easier to reach a consensus on what constitutes proper English.

Therein lies the problem. Proponents of “Black English” are

radical egalitarians who are aghast at the existence of hierarchies. Yet the inequality that marks all hierarchies is normal and there is nothing inherently wrong with that. Age and sex are universal human characteristics, and they smack of hierarchical distinctions.

The push for "Black English" is also part of the diversity mindset. Its proponents see assimilation as a problem to be conquered, which is why they promote multiculturalism. At bottom, they resent the superiority of Western civilization, which is why they seek to bolster its competitors.

Ashley Williams is leading the cause for "Black English" in California. A closer look at what her real beef is suggests she is bedeviled by her upbringing—her family insisted on mastering the English language—and is now embarked on a cause that seeks to avenge her experience. She was taught at home that so-called Black English "wasn't OK at the schoolhouse."

Her family did her a favor, but she doesn't see it that way. She recalls being teased for "talking white," and says she does not want her son to feel "shame" for voicing "Black English."

She has it backwards. Those who teased her are the problem and those who label blacks as "acting white" for succeeding need to be sanctioned. The answer is not to object to those who harass her son for saying, "they happy," but to instruct her son to say, "they are happy." To do so, however, would require her to acknowledge the legitimacy of conventional English, and that is too much for her to bear.

This phenomenon is not new. In the 1980s, black anthropologists John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham found that black students underperform in school partly because those who do well are teased for being "white." "Why are you working so hard on that school stuff? You think you're white?" Columbia professor John McWhorter experienced the same labeling growing

up as a black student.

Lowering standards, which is what normalizing “Black English” does, helps no one, most especially black students. No radio or TV station worth its salt would ever hire someone who says, “she be working.”

Most important, it is racist to maintain that blacks can’t learn to speak correct English when those who struggle to learn it—e.g., Spanish and Chinese speaking students—do so successfully all the time. It matters not a whit if those who advocate “Black English” have good intentions—what they are promoting is racist in effect.