

# Inventing “the White Voice”: Racial Capitalism, Raciolinguistics & Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

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*In this essay, I explore how paradigms like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies can offer substantive breaks from mainstream thought and provide us with new, just, and equitable ways of living together in the world. I begin with a deep engagement with Boots Riley and his critically acclaimed, anticapitalist, absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You*, in hopes of demonstrating how artists, activists, creatives, and scholars might: 1) cotheorize the complex relationships between language and racial capitalism and 2) think through the political, economic, and pedagogical implications of this new theorizing for Communities of Color. In our current sociopolitical situation, we need to continue making pedagogical moves toward freedom that center and sustain Communities of Color in the face of the myriad ways that white settler capitalist terror manifests. As we continue to theorize the relationships between language and racial capitalism, frameworks like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies provide fundamentally critical, antiracist, anticolonial approaches that reject the capitalist white settler gaze and its kindred cisheteropatriarchal, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, and other hegemonic gazes. What they offer us, instead, is a break from the assimilationist politics of the past and a move toward abolitionist frameworks of the future.*

UCLA’s Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Language and the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies’ Hip Hop Initiative invited Boots Riley to campus. Riley, the director of the critically acclaimed, anticapitalist, absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You*, and winner of the Sundance Institute’s highly coveted Vanguard Award, had produced a provocative work of art with far-reaching implications related to the theme of this volume: language, race, and social justice. Every scholar of race on campus was discussing the film. As a result, I invited Robin D. G. Kelley, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and Kelly Lytle Hernández, all historians and scholars of the Black radical tradition, to join me in conversation with Riley so that we might: 1) cotheorize the complex relationships between lan-

guage and racial capitalism and 2) think through the political, economic, and pedagogical implications of this new theorizing for Communities of Color.<sup>1</sup>

Boots spent the entire day with us. Sporting a tan corduroy jacket and rocking the classic afro and sideburns he has come to be known for, he lectured masterfully, without notes, for over an hour to over three hundred undergraduate students in my course on “Culture and Communication” and fielded their questions long after the class session had ended. Then he engaged in a lively discussion with C-BLAAC, a Black graduate student group in the department of anthropology, as well as Bunche Center faculty. Later that evening, we hosted a screening of *Sorry to Bother You* to a standing-room-only crowd in the Fowler Museum, which was followed by a rich, extended dialogue with Riley. It was, quite simply, a beautiful thing to witness.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his career, Riley has created immensely powerful works of art – from music to film – all while being in the movement struggle as an activist and organizer, taking incredible risks to both his person and his career. *Sorry to Bother You* was an instant classic, but I first became acquainted with Boots Riley through his innovative music with Oakland-based Hip Hop group The Coup back when I was a graduate student at Stanford University immersing myself in Bay-Area Hip Hop to survive the racial absurdity of life for People of Color at that elite, overwhelmingly white institution. I would meet Boots again in 2002 at Harvard University’s Hiphop Archive at the invitation of Dr. Marcyliena Morgan. Years later, after seeing how deeply involved Boots was in the Occupy Movement as a constant and vocal presence in #OccupyOakland in 2011, I invited him to speak to our students about how artists were engaging in anticapitalist resistance and helping us to imagine new futures.

I’ve learned so much from each of our engagements. When I picked him up from the hotel, I thanked him, and he said, “For what?” I told him, “For communicating better in *just two hours* what it has taken linguists decades to try to say – and we still haven’t said it nearly as well. That’s what you’ve done in *Sorry to Bother You*.” As we wound our way west on LA’s storied Sunset Boulevard, we talked about how art can be a much more powerful medium “to communicate revolutionary ideas to the people” than the academy. And yet scholars owe it to themselves and others to reach far beyond the walls of their hallowed institutions and dusty journals. Reflecting on that conversation, I think Riley was trying to make sure that, even as he acknowledged the important role of the academy, I was also acknowledging its limits, particularly with respect to its often exclusionary discourses, unimaginative means of communicating with the public, and frequent lip-service given to social impact, all of which belie a questionable theory of, and suspect commitment to, change.

Within the academy, we talked about the emerging area of raciolinguistics, our establishment of the Oxford University Press book series Oxford Studies in Language and Race, and the field of language and race

writ large, in particular how scholars of color are increasingly rejecting analyses of language that ignore race, racism, and racialization. We were shocked that, even among our more progressive white allies, many linguists who watched *Sorry to Bother You* reported being caught off guard, even disappointed, because they expected a film about “language” and instead “got a film about race and capitalism,” as if these things were mutually exclusive. When I shared this with Boots, he responded, “I guess it depends on what your definition of language is,” highlighting how most academic training in linguistics has historically preferred to deal with language as an abstract system severed from its social context, and even when that context is considered, it is a raceless one or one aligned with white normativity.<sup>3</sup> However, as I wrote in the introduction to *Raciolinguistics*, one of our goals is to “better understand the role of language in maintaining and challenging racism as a global system of capitalist oppression.”<sup>4</sup> And we can do this by “taking intersectional approaches that understand race as always produced jointly with class, gender, sexuality, religion, (trans)national, and other axes of social differentiation” used in complex vectors of oppression.<sup>5</sup>

This is why *Sorry to Bother You* is such an important film: It not only uses a linguistic device (“the white voice”) as its central metaphor, but it also throws into sharp relief the links between language, patriarchy, racial capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Further, the film helps viewers take a critical, social constructionist view of language and race, showing both to be social processes invented for particular purposes. In Boots’s own words, as he explained to my linguistic anthropology students, the white voice represents a “performance of whiteness that is at once in juxtaposition to what white people are told Blackness is,” as well as “racist tropes of People of Color, which... have a utility” in that they serve the interests of the capitalist elite. Last, and perhaps most important, the film highlights that anticapitalist, antipatriarchal, and anticolonial resistance necessitates the deconstruction of these social categories in order to imagine new ways of existing together in the world.

The protagonist of the film, Cassius Green (sound it out, “cash is green;” played by Lakeith Stanfield), is a Black telemarketer living in a rapidly gentrifying Oakland. Cassius is not only struggling to make ends meet, but he is also struggling to live a life that has meaning above and beyond the crushing weight of capitalism and its daily, routinized grind. In perhaps the most iconic scene of the film, Cassius’s more senior coworker Langston (played by Danny Glover) observes his poor performance and offers him some advice. It’s at this moment that Langston introduces “the white voice”:

001 | Langston: [laughing at Cassius’s failure to secure a sale as a customer hangs up on him]  
002 | Hey, youngblood.

003 | Cassius: What up?  
004 | Langston: Let me give you a tip. Use your white voice.  
005 | Cassius: My white voice?  
006 | Langston: Yeah.  
007 | Cassius: Maaan, I ain't got no white voice.  
008 | Langston: Oh, come on. You know what I mean, youngblood. You have a  
009 | white voice in there. You can use it. It's like being pulled over by the police.  
010 | Cassius: [*sarcastically*] Ohhh, nooo. I just use my regular voice when that hap-  
011 | pens. I just say, "Back the fuck up off the car, and don't nobody get hurt."  
012 | Langston: Alright, man, I'm just tryna give you some game. You wanna  
013 | make some money here? Then read your script with a white voice.  
014 | Cassius: People say I talk with a white voice anyway, so why ain't it helpin  
015 | me out?  
016 | Langston: Well, you don't talk white enough. I'm not talkin about Will  
017 | Smith white. That ain't white, that's just proper.  
018 | Cassius: Mm-hmm.  
019 | Langston: I'm talkin about the real deal.  
020 | Cassius: So, like [*plugging his nose with his fingers to give his voice an exaggerated*  
021 | *nasal quality*], "Hello, Mr. Everett, Cassius Green here. Sooorry to boooother  
022 | you." [*mocking white speech through ritualized performance*]  
023 | Langston: Now, look, look, you got that wrong. I'm not talkin about soundin  
024 | all *nasal*. It's like sounding like you don't have a care. You got your bills paid.  
025 | You're happy about your future. You're about ready to jump into *your* Ferrari  
026 | out there after you get off this call. Put some real [*voice gets breathy*] breath in  
027 | there, breezy like, "I don't really need this money." You've never been fired,  
028 | only laid off. It's not really a white voice. It's what they *wish* they sounded  
029 | like. So, it's like, what they think they're *supposed* to sound like. Like this,  
030 | youngblood, [*Langston performs the magical white voice*] "Heyyy, Mr. Kramer,  
031 | this is Langston from Regal View. I didn't catch you at the wrong time,  
032 | did I?"  
033 | Cassius: [*looking back at Langston, stunned into silence as the scene fades*]<sup>6</sup>

The dialogue between Cassius and Langston makes it clear that the white voice is not merely what some folks refer to as "sounding white." In lines 016–017, Langston states that he is not referring to Black people who speak "standard English," or even those that speak in ways that are palatable to white folks ("I'm not talkin about Will Smith white. That ain't white, that's just proper"). Later, we also see that the white voice that Langston is referring to is not to be mistaken with ritualized, comedic mockeries of white speech, which have been performed by Black comedians and others for decades.<sup>7</sup> So the white voice, then, is not what Cassius performs in lines 020–022 when he plugs his nose and speaks with an exaggerated nasal quality.

If the white voice doesn't refer to these common speech events, then what does it refer to? As Langston explained to Cassius in line 009, it's the voice that many

People of Color use when being “pulled over by the police,” that everyday (yet soul-murdering) transformation of bodily comportment, facial expressions, and language that some of us perform to “help” white police officers see us as human. We draw on every ounce of our accumulated cultural capital and perform a version of whiteness that most white officers themselves do not even possess. We develop additional routines as well. For me, it was “accidentally” pulling out my Stanford University ID card instead of my driver’s license, which helped me on some occasions (I did it every single time I was pulled over – sometimes they got mad, sometimes they softened a bit, but I know enough to know that it was never a guarantee of safety or equitable treatment under the law). I wasn’t mocking whiteness, nor was I performing “whiteness” as verbal artistic realism. Instead, I was creating abstract verbal art, giving them what they themselves *thought* they sounded like, or perhaps *aspired* to sound like. Langston explains this brilliantly, and quite humorously, in the key passage of the excerpt (lines 023–029):

Now, look, look, you got that wrong. I’m not talkin about soundin all *nasal*. It’s like sounding like you don’t have a care. You got your bills paid. You’re happy about your future. You’re about ready to jump into *your* Ferrari out there after you get off this call. Put some real [voice gets breathy] breath in there, breezy like, “I don’t really need this money.” You’ve never been fired, only laid off. It’s not really a white voice. It’s what they *wish* they sounded like. So, it’s like, what they think they’re *supposed* to sound like.

I’ll return to this aspirational whiteness below. Later, we see that Cassius begins using the white voice and experiencing some serious success. In fact, his employers at Regal View are ecstatic with his improved job performance. However, Cassius goes above and beyond simply using the white voice. He references stereotypically white cultural touchstones and uses intonation associated with white Americans, while using slang associated with Black Americans or at least having originated with Black speakers [“holla, holla, holla, hollaaaaa!”]. Humorously, he sometimes juxtaposes this slang while describing himself engaging in stereotypically white activities (“Tim, I wanna *chop it up* more, but I gotta get to my *squash game*. [Then rapidly follows with] Was that Visa or MasterCard?”), increasing his sales numbers.

In the film, we see that his white customers also use slang associated with Black folks, even if outdated, like, “Booyah!” In one scene, Cassius Green and his white customer jointly construct hypermasculinity through use of Black slang in discussing how the customer’s acquisition of the merchandise that Cassius is selling will lead to sexual intercourse with a desirable woman. But, importantly, it’s not only his white voice that’s helping him achieve success. Cassius is also employing slang associated with Black folks in ways that might confirm stereotypical ideas about Blackness in the white imagination: that is, Black men and Black sexual prowess. Ultimately, the use of the white voice has such success because it simul-

taneously alleviates white fears about Blackness (Cassius is later introduced to the CEO, “It’s OK, he’s friendly”) and confirms white stereotypes about Black people – in this case, providing a patriarchal “bonding moment” for these two men.

Cassius’s “success” earns him a promotion to “power caller,” but he’s no longer selling magazine subscriptions. He’s now selling arms and human beings into slavery through a company named WorryFree. When Cassius meets WorryFree CEO Steve Lift, he “praises” Cassius as a “cunning racoon.” Inside Lift’s mansion, Lift is surrounded by his party guests (mostly his “groupies,” women hanging all over him), telling a story about how he killed a rhinoceros during one of his hunting trips and turned it into a trophy. He then turns to Cassius and asks, “What about you, Cash? Have you ever had to bust a cap in anybody’s ass?” As he invites Cassius to come sit down in front of him on the floor, he adds, “I wanna hear about some of that Oakland gangster shit, man. Oak Town!”<sup>8</sup>

As the CEO continues the litany of racist stereotypes, Cassius apologizes because he doesn’t have any “cool stories,” but the CEO insists aggressively:

034 CEO: Alright, well, I mean, give us *something*, right? These boring cunts are at  
035 every single one of my parties. You’re different, man. Make an impression. At  
036 least take off the white voice. And I know you can bust a rap, right?  
037 Cassius: [*in his regular voice*] No, actually, I can’t, umm....  
038 CEO: Bullshit! Come on, bullshit.  
039 Cassius: I *can’t*, man. I mean, I can listen to rap well, but I just can’t rap. It’s  
040 actually embarrassing.  
041 CEO: I don’t know, I think he’s lying. I think you can rap. I think you should  
042 rap. Rap! Rap! Rap! [*The CEO’s chant is now echoed by everyone in the room.*] Rap!  
043 Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! [*repeated approximately 25 times, creating an*  
044 *overwhelming sense of discomfort for Cassius and even the least racially literate members*  
045 *of the movie audience*].<sup>9</sup>

In response to the deafening chant, Cassius attempts to rap on what is now a makeshift concert stage. It turns out that he was telling the truth – he has *zero* rap skills. As he flounders in front of the guests, he tries to rhyme a lame line about drugs, which fails miserably. He looks around anxiously at his now bored white audience and comes up with a strategy. He starts chanting: “N\*gga shit, n\*gga shit, n\*gga n\*gga n\*gga shit!” The crowd loves it, chants along enthusiastically, throwing their hands up in the air as if they just don’t care (the scene is now an absurd Hip Hop club concert). And so there it is. Cassius has given the CEO and his party guests *exactly* what they wanted, some real life “n\*gga shit”: that is, something profoundly and stereotypically Black that would confirm all of their essentialist, racist ideas about Black people, including the profoundly reductive (and fetishizing) notion that every Black person has a “real n\*gga” inside of them who

only comes out when white people aren't looking ("Bullshit. I think he's lying"). He has also given them the much-desired access to Black cultural space for their enjoyment.

Cassius has both exploited and been exploited by white desires to come into contact with the exotic masculine Black man, the gangsta Black man, the violent ("bust a cap"), Black talking ("at least drop the white voice"), Hip Hopping ("bust a rap") Black man. As the scene fades with surreal white cheers of "n\*gga shit," Cassius seems to know that he has both saved his career and sold his soul to the devil. He has allowed himself to fall prey to the ultimate form of racial reductionism. Cassius is caught between performing "the white voice" and performing "n\*gga shit" for white folks, both figures of the white raciolinguistic imagination. He must display his "true" Blackness, but only when it is appropriate, only when asked, and only when given permission by whites. They don't want the complexity of his Blackness, his humanity. They want what they *think* Blackness is, and they want Cassius to cosign it for them. In the end, Cassius is left with a choice that's not really a choice at all. What kinds of decisions do we make when our art is commodified, when *we* are commodified, and when our ability to supply basic necessities, such as food and housing, hangs in the balance?

As Robin Kelley would later point out in our discussion with Boots, the use of the white voice in the film carries deep, if not absurd, historical significance as well, particularly if we recall Langston's advice to Cassius:

Langston's deconstruction of the white voice slyly breaks down the principles of minstrelsy: white men in blackface adopted a black voice not as it was but as white folks imagined it to be. I do not mean the plantation dialect or the corruption of words but the intonations that come from imagining that slaves don't have a care in the world. As we have learned from the historians Eric Lott and David Roediger, minstrelsy was a product not only of hatred and fear, but also of envy. It wasn't just black bodies white men envied, but the association of blackness with sexual abandon and the rhythms of preindustrial life – with the performing rather than the laboring body, as it danced and sang. Ironically, the enslaved African – who often worked in gangs from sun up to sun down under the supervision of a driver – came to represent freedom from industrial time and discipline.<sup>10</sup>

By engaging in Black linguistic practice – that is, language use associated with Black people, such as rap or the use of certain slang – white customers and partygoers are elevated from "corny" to "cool." Meanwhile, Black users of the white voice remain in a form of suspended animation, winning limited material success but suffering severe cultural and linguistic deprecation, while staying excluded from the elite class, always in performance, forever in service to them. Their success, as demonstrated by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (the Black guardian of Lift's golden elevator), depends on their ability to suppress the absurdity of this state of affairs

and to ignore how their individual success depends upon the oppression of the collective.<sup>11</sup> Throughout, women remain sexual objects to be purchased by men, nothing more than adornment, degraded, humiliated, and happy about it. No resistance is shown to the CEO's misogynist comment, "These boring cunts are at every single one of my parties."

As Riley lays out his raciolinguistic vision, we come to see that all of this degradation is central to white supremacist, patriarchal, racial capitalism.<sup>12</sup> As Boots himself reminded me that day, "Culture comes from how we survive, and how we survive is determined by the economic system that we're in, and so you need to have a class analysis. Having a class analysis means also to understand that race and class are tied together inextricably" (and of course gender and sexuality as well). If we revisit Langston's advice to Cassius – about the white voice being aspirational – we can see more clearly that the white voice isn't merely about some performance to convince customers that he's white. For Boots, that performance highlights the links between whiteness, racism, capitalism, and (settler) colonialism. In fact, he described the function of the white voice as a voice

that maybe white people don't even have but they wish they had, think they're supposed to have. And so, it's just talking about the idea of whiteness as this idea that actually is juxtaposed with and against racist tropes of People of Color... [There's] a utility there. They say, "Look, look how savage Black folks are!" "Look how their family structure's broken!" You know, "They just don't have the drive. They don't have the tools they need to win in society. And that is something to do with *them*." And so, it's a way of explaining poverty as the bad mistakes of the impoverished.

He continued:

But the truth is this. It's that under capitalism you must have a certain amount of unemployed people... Because if you did have full employment, then every worker could demand whatever wage they wanted, because there's nobody to replace them... They need an army of unemployed people, to threaten people with jobs, with losing their jobs, to say, "We can replace you." So poverty is built into capitalism, and capitalism must have poverty. But how do you explain that to the largest section of the working class in the United States, which are white people? ... You don't... You create an Other, and you point at them, and you say, "You don't want to be like them." And so you end up having this performance of whiteness, that is, at once in juxtaposition to what white people are told Blackness is. And at the same time, this allows some white guy making \$22,000 a year in the Midwest to think that they are the middle class and identify more with the ruling class than with other people who are suffering. And so, all these racist ideas have a utility. And that's the reason they exist... They're useful.



For *Boots*, the idea of race was created and manipulated to serve European capitalist and colonial interests: “The whole reason that there is capitalism, as we have it today, was a big part of stealing labor and stealing land, and the idea of race was created to assuage the white working class in Europe, with the idea that you’re not going to be enslaved. ‘Don’t worry . . .’ Because at the time race meant species. . . . There wasn’t this idea that people in France were the same as the people in Ireland because they were white.” As Kelley pointed out in his brilliant *Boston Review* piece about the film, Riley uses the white voice to:

interrogate the privileges and poverty of whiteness. . . . Like whiteness itself, the white voice is a chimera, masking a specific class position and conveying a sense of being genuinely worry free, with no bills to pay, money in the bank, not a care in the world. This is the expectation of whiteness – an expectation many white people never, in fact, realize.<sup>13</sup>

Riley’s use of the white voice points to whiteness – and race – as an invention. As we see in the film, particularly when characters debate the status of Italians as white, understanding whiteness as an invention points to its inherent instability. The white voice as it’s used in the film also underscores Blackness as a figment of the white imagination. The white voice is not only what white people *think* they sound like, or think they are *supposed* to sound like, but the whole abstraction, as with whiteness itself, is set in opposition to white ideas about what they *think* Blackness is and what Black people are *supposed* to sound like.

But the real brilliance of the white voice is that it is *disembodied*. It should be clear by now that the white voice is not an actual representation of “white speech.” *Boots*’ white voice is not just a linguistic performance but a device that draws attention to the crushing system of racial capitalism. This is why the actors themselves don’t perform the white voice. To *Boots*, when Cassius speaks in the white voice, it’s “supposed to sound like an overdub to the other people around him. . . a magical voice that is coming from somewhere else.” As he explains, the reason for that is twofold:

One, often when writers have someone like a superhero have magic powers. . . it’s usually their way of saying what they think the problem is in the world, right? So we have all these superheroes whose power is that they’re strong enough to beat people up, right? And usually, that’s because apparently, the problem is poor people who are doing crimes. And that’s the big picture, that this person develops this superpower and they can stop crime. Stop people physically. And . . . if they thought that the problem was more systemic, then – and I don’t know how you just show this in a superpower – but they’d be trying to change the economic system that we’re in, right. But so, that power’s often a comment on what the problem is. And so, I wanted him to have a power that dealt with the problems . . . that you have to deal with when you have the identi-

fiers of race and being Black. So, I wanted that to not just be something that he figured out, but to have it be a magic power to say that that is a problem that people have to deal with. But I also wanted it to not be his voice. I needed it to be something that was separate from his body, something that was an idea on its own. Because as Langston, Danny Glover's character explains, it's not something connected genetically, even to white people.

In these remarks, Boots appeals to audiences to complicate the oft-heard inadequate readings of the white voice that don't explain the political-economic theory of race behind its use. As Kelley and others have pointed out, WorryFree is not only the name of the corporation selling human beings into slavery. Under this surreal scenario, human beings willingly give up life in the capitalist "rat race" to live in what are essentially prison cells with multiple bunks to a room, eating slop for sustenance, and achieving "worry-free" status with no more bills to pay or outside responsibilities. But the company's name also points to the worry-free quality of the white voice (how whites think they sound, or should sound), as well as the imagined worry-free existence of enslaved Africans. Further, if we recall Boots's comments about the invention of race to serve capitalist ends, WorryFree also points to the suggestion by imperial powers for the white European poor to remain worry-free because they wouldn't be enslaved like the "darker peoples of the earth."

**T**he links between language, race, capitalism, and colonialism are brought sharply into focus by the character of Cassius's girlfriend, Detroit (played by Tessa Thompson), an activist and visual and performance artist and one of only two other characters in the film that uses a "white voice." The difference here is that Detroit's overdubbed white voice represents a prestigious, albeit exaggerated, British variety, as well as the "ideal" of white femininity. In the film, we notice immediately that she's talking to prospective art buyers in a voice that sounds radically different from her usual voice, including using gasps to display interest among other affectations. Later during her stunning stage performance, she appears virtually nude and encourages audience members to throw "broken cell phones, used bullet casings, and water balloons filled with sheep's blood" at her body while she continues to perform – and the movie audience either looks away or watches the grotesque scene as Detroit's patrons begin to violently hurl the items at her body.<sup>14</sup>

As Boots explained, Detroit's white voice was meant to sound more prestigious than the American white voice in order to convey the so-called sophistication of "the art world." To me, the British white voice might also function as a raciolinguistic symbol of the economic exploitation of Africa by European, capitalist, imperialist powers. It's not lost on the audience that the brutality of the European exploitation – the theft of humans and natural resources, the destruction

of lands and ways of life, the ongoing neocolonial, extractive practices by the tech industry and others – is visited upon the bodies of Black women, as represented by the physical pain endured by Detroit during her performance. Detroit’s performance conveys the idea that the destruction of Black women – from the unspeakable horrors of enslavement and genocide to the precarity of contemporary life – is the ultimate price of the white supremacist, patriarchal, racial capitalist, imperial ticket. The white voice, as a cinematic device, provokes these and other serious ideas and questions.

However, not only do oft-heard descriptions of the white voice not adequately represent the theory of race that informs Riley’s film, they also fall short in communicating the complexity of his theory of language – and, of course, that language and race are being theorized *together* throughout.<sup>15</sup> As I shared in “Hearing What’s Not Said and Missing What Is,” white folks can and often do *invent* the linguistic practices of People of Color in ways that track neatly with the stereotypes they hold about them.<sup>16</sup> White racial and linguistic hegemony shapes how speech is heard and interpreted through what Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa have termed *raciolinguistic ideologies*. As they point out, the “raciolinguistic ideologies of the white listening subject can stigmatize language use regardless of one’s empirical linguistic practices.”<sup>17</sup> Just as Riley urges us to focus on the system that the abstract, disembodied white voice is meant to critique, these scholars have similarly urged us to look beyond “empirical linguistic practices” of People of Color and to the perceiving practices of whites.

Building upon research on language ideologies, and leaning on linguistic anthropologist Miyako Inoue’s powerful theorizing of what she refers to as “the listening subject,” this recent work can be seen as an effort to critique language scholarship’s focus on speaker agency and to push the theoretical pendulum back toward hearers, particularly when “the listening subject” is used to refer to hegemonic systems of power.<sup>18</sup> Inoue’s work on gender has been taken up to consider not just how language can transform race but also how “racialized signs come to transform linguistic ones.”<sup>19</sup> Riley’s separation of the white voice from any physical body highlights hegemonic perceiving practices as crucial to theorizing language and race. How whites hear *themselves* – and in relation to how they hear Black folks – creates both language and race in the white raciolinguistic imagination in ways that have material consequences for People of Color and, as Boots points out, poor whites.

**T**he process of racialization – whereby race is an enduring yet evolving social process steeped in centuries of colonialism and capitalism – is central to recent linguistic anthropological approaches to language and race.<sup>20</sup> But Boots’s analysis of the white voice also echoes studies of race that have long shown race to be inextricable from histories of genocide, enslavement, apartheid,

occupation, dispossession, nationalism, capitalism, and various forms of colonialism, as well as their contemporary manifestations. Anthropologist Arthur Spears, for example, argues for studies of race and language that amplify “the macro contexts” in which they are produced, what he refers to as the “political-economic pentad”:

- (1) the global system; (2) the state; (3) ideology-coercion (in practice, two sides of the same coin), for the purposes of social and resource control via regime maintenance; (4) social stratification, not simply as regards socioeconomic class but also other hierarchies of oppression [I stress the hierarchical and also the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of oppressive systems]; and (5) oppression-exploitation (also two sides of the same coin).<sup>21</sup>

If we read Spears together with Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You*, what becomes evident is that the terror, violence, and brutality of these systems are not only the macro contexts in which race and language are produced, but white supremacy comes to *depend* on the idea of race and, therefore, processes of racialization for its continued propagation. As anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli summarizes, racialization processes not only measure everyone else against a hegemonic norm, but analysis of racialization is “productively approached by examining not merely the emergence but the active construction of that norm as whiteness in relation to labor and economic structures and reinforced by social policies, as shown by [W. E. B.] DuBois (1947), [David] Roediger (1991), [Theodore W.] Allen (1994), [Matthew Frye] Jacobson (1998), and [George] Lipsitz (1998) among others.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, another point of brilliance in Riley’s use of the white voice is that language – in addition to race – is also an invention. Language is a category that continues to be taken for granted by race theorists and even some linguists and anthropologists. As with race, linguists Cristine Severo and Sinfree Makoni urge us to take a critical perspective that shows how “languages are historically and politically invented by a complex colonial apparatus that [overlays] language, race, power, and religion in specific ways,” and that our “concepts of language should be submitted to continuous revision so that we avoid using colonial frameworks to describe and problematize historical power relations.”<sup>23</sup>

This call for continued revision is also, in part, the power of *Sorry to Bother You*. It helps explain why I couldn’t find the words to thank Boots Riley when I picked him up at the hotel. With his artistic vision, he has not only helped us theorize the political economy of language and race more clearly, but he has given us a mandate to think more creatively about how to express those ideas. Like the path-breaking work of Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Riley has also urged us to think about language and race more broadly, as processes that are interconnected with political-economic systems and histories of colonial relations, yet remain unstable, and thus worth fighting against.<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate the above ideas, I share this one interaction between Boots Riley and my undergraduate students that highlights the ways *Sorry to Bother You* can help us rethink the more traditional concerns of linguistics. After Boots explained that performance is inherent in how we live – “we can’t get away from performing” – one of my students asked him: “Do you believe that code-switching is inherently necessary for Black people to survive in this society?” Boots quickly replied by entirely reframing the question:

I don’t. I think that what’s inherently necessary is for us to have a movement that gets rid of the capitalist system.... For me, that’s not the question, like, “How do we survive in a terrible system?” You know, I’m like, “Well, how do we get rid of the system?” What if somebody came up with a book for how slaves can endorse slavery each day without getting killed? We’d be like, “Why are you writing that book? You need to be writing a whole different book or not writing a book, period, actually.”

Boots brilliantly shifted the object of critique away from Black people, and their linguistic practices, and toward the oppressive systems that, in one way or another, enslave or incarcerate them (the link to the abolition of the prison industrial complex is obvious). He further reframed the question in ways that point out the absurdity of assimilationist approaches, and nudged students toward the abolitionist leanings of more radical approaches. As I wrote with Geneva Smitherman, not only are conventional approaches assimilationist, they are also insidious because they require the *impossible*.<sup>25</sup> White hegemonic power doesn’t just demand that Black people learn some grammatical rules; rather, it requires that Black Americans act, talk, and sound like whites if they are to experience “success,” which is framed as readily available to them if they would just make some morphosyntactic changes (John Baugh’s 2003 research on “linguistic profiling” provides ample evidence of that fallacy).<sup>26</sup>

The impossibility of the demand comes into clearer focus when we flip the question on its racist head: how many white people could pass the test of sounding “authentically” Black in order to ensure their upward mobility? Chances are that most would sound like straight-up posers unless they grew up in Black communities and/or have intimate Black friendship networks. There is little, if any, chance that a white person can “let go” of the markers of their whiteness, and even less chance of successfully securing employment, for example, if landing the job depended on one’s mastery of code-switching into Black linguistic norms. But whether or not whites can perform “Black linguistic norms” is beside the point, isn’t it? Hegemonic whiteness bolsters itself by requiring ideologies that “produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects.”<sup>27</sup> Given the above discussion of the linkages between language, race, capitalism, and colonialism, we would never, or more accu-

rately *could* never, ask this of whites. Given the machinations of power, it would appear nonsensical.

As Smitherman's work has reminded us for decades, with respect to "the oppressive ways of white folks," the problem has never been that Black people "sound" Black (a result of Black people's inventing a new language for themselves through linguistic creolization in the context of the terror of the African Slave Trade); it's that they *were* Black (that white people needed to perceive all signs of Blackness as inferior in order to justify their slavocracy).<sup>28</sup> "Suddenly, after more than three centuries on this continent, the educational and societal consensus is that Blacks have a 'language problem,'" Smitherman writes. "But wasn't nobody complainin bout Black speech in 1619 when the first cargo of Africans was brought here on the Good Ship Jesus. Yeah, that's right. Not in 1719, 1819, wasn't till bout the 1950s when it became evident that Afros was really beginning to make some economic headway in America that everybody and they Momma started talkin bout we didn talk right."<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, James Baldwin wrote over forty years ago that debates about Black Language had "absolutely nothing to do with the question the argument supposes itself to be posing. The argument has nothing to do with the language itself but with the role of language. Language, incontestably, reveals the speaker." He then dropped the hammer: "The brutal truth is that the bulk of white people in America never had any interest in educating black people, except as this could serve white purposes. It is not the black child's language that is in question, it is not his language that is despised: It is his experience."<sup>30</sup> To Baldwin, the sounds that came to reference the Black linguistic history of creolization were audible reminders of a fact that most white Americans refused (and still refuse) to face: it is not the presence of the sounds, but rather, the presence of the speakers – the Black descendants of people who would have otherwise been born on the African continent were it not for the terror of enslavement – that reveals their complicity with the imperialist, white settler colonial-capitalist system that they continue to benefit from. In other words, the question was never one about Black people but about a culture and system of white greed.

Rooted in a broader political-economic analysis, Boots's raciolinguistic pedagogy is based on a linguistics of refusal that bucks the notion of "bidialectalism" (what white linguist James Sledd referred to as "the linguistics of white supremacy" as far back as the 1960s), in which white people insist on Black children's "code-switching" as a precondition for their success while white kids get to remain blissfully, if not woefully, monolingual.<sup>31</sup> Boots's raciolinguistic pedagogy is not the linguistics of reform, but rather an abolitionist linguistics that might finally throw a wrench in the "push-pull" dynamics that have haunted Black folks for too long.<sup>32</sup>

Rather than viewing questions about code-switching as an end point, Riley takes them as the *starting* point for new raciolinguistic futures. As Geneva Smith-

erman and I wrote, “By asking different kinds of questions, we can stop silently legitimizing ‘standardized English’ and tacitly standardizing ‘whiteness.’”<sup>33</sup> *Sorry to Bother You* pushes us in a different direction. Rather than promoting uncritical, conformist, and assimilationist models of schooling and survival, we should invest our intellectual energies in imagining and creating more egalitarian societies. As Boots explained to my students, “the best way to be engaged with the world is to change the world.” We simply cannot continue to produce future generations who believe that the only pathway to success, or even just survival, is to S.T.T.S. (“stick to the script,” the omnipresent motto of the telemarketing call center where Cassius Green was employed).

**I**n our current sociopolitical situation, we need to continue making pedagogical moves toward freedom that center and sustain Communities of Color in the face of the myriad ways that white settler capitalist terror manifests: culturally, racially, linguistically, politically, geographically, economically, epistemically, and otherwise. As we continue to theorize the relationships between language and racial capitalism, frameworks like culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) provide fundamentally critical, antiracist, anticolonial approaches that reject the capitalist white settler gaze and its kindred cisheteropatriarchal, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, and other hegemonic gazes.<sup>34</sup> Like Riley, these frameworks are not interested in relegating learners’ cultural and linguistic resources as tools for advancing the learning of an “acceptable” curricular canon, a “standard” variety of language, or other so-called academic skills.

Rather, extending my approach of critical language awareness, we are interested in producing young people who can interrogate what counts as “acceptable” or “canonical,” what language varieties are heard as “standard,” and what ways of knowing are viewed as “academic.”<sup>35</sup> As I’ve been arguing for twenty years, our pedagogies must do much more than simply take students’ language into account; they must also “account for the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical systems that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still-segregated society.”<sup>36</sup> Our students should be able to ask questions like: How did these perspectives come to be the dominant ones? Whose purposes do they serve? And how do they uphold white supremacist systems of racial capitalism and its efforts to produce *not* critically thinking human beings, but cheap sources of labor?<sup>37</sup>

Our critical approaches are not concerned with the study of decontextualized language (recall my opening car ride conversation with Boots), but rather with the analysis of “opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language.”<sup>38</sup> Norman Fairclough argues that the job of sociolinguists should be to do more than ask, “What language varieties are stigmatized?”<sup>39</sup> Rather, we should be asking, “How –

in terms of the development of social relationships to power – was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being? How is it sustained? And how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?” If educational institutions are designed to teach citizens about the current sociolinguistic order of things, without challenging that order, then our pedagogies must continue to pull away from the generally noncritical American sociolinguistic tradition. Even in our more critical traditions, we often stop at asking how language is used to maintain, reinforce, and perpetuate existing power relations. In the interest of freedom, we need pedagogies that *also* ask how language – in conjunction with all available other means – can be used to resist, redefine, and possibly reverse these relations. This approach engages in the process of consciousness-raising: that is, the process of actively becoming aware of one’s own position in the world and, importantly, what to do about it.

This process begins with mining history. Returning to my opening conversation with Boots about the academy, a critical CSP framework requires us to theorize from the “ground-up” and from the “past-forward” by recovering and reworking the suppressed pedagogies that enabled Communities of Color to survive even the most brutal of contexts. As literacy scholar Carol Lee has argued, in the contexts of genocide and enslavement – the foundational, settler colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans – acts of historic and cultural resistance and “survival” have allowed Indigenous and African-descended communities to sustain practices and belief systems (and their very lives) in the face of racialized white terror.<sup>40</sup> Sustaining those practices is one way we can go beyond reformist pedagogies that ask, to quote Boots, “how slaves can endorse slavery each day without being killed,” and move toward abolitionist ones that seek to change the conditions under which we live and create new, emancipatory futures. Our goal is to reimagine education not only within the context of centuries of oppression and domination, but critically, also to draw strength and wisdom from centuries of intergenerational revitalization, resistance, and the revolutionary spirit of our communities in the face of such brutality.

As I hope to have shown, following Boots’s lead, scholars should work with artists, activists, community organizations, teachers, and various “folks on the ground” (particularly those doing revolutionary work who risk both their person and their livelihoods) in order to understand the more nuanced perspectives that arise directly from the histories and experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups. Our theorizing should be led by our interactions at the grassroots level. Artists, activists, community organizers, and other social actors have much to offer academic theorists of racial capitalism, raciolinguistics, and culturally sustaining pedagogies moving forward. Like Riley’s film, our collective work is meant to disrupt, to provoke, to bother you, and like the best art, to inspire all of us to imagine – *and fight for* – new, just, and equitable ways of living together in the world.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

H. Samy Alim is the Presidential Endowed Chair in the Social Sciences and Professor of Anthropology at UCLA. He is Associate Director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies and Faculty Director of the UCLA Hip Hop Initiative. He has written extensively about Black Language and Hip Hop Culture globally—across the United States, Spain, and South Africa. His publications include *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (2006), *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (with Awad Ibrahim and Alastair Pennycook, 2009), *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race* (with John R. Rickford and Arnetta F. Ball, 2016), *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (with Django Paris, 2017), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race* (with Angela Reyes and Paul Kroskrity, 2020), and *Freedom Moves: Hip Hop Knowledges, Pedagogies, and Futures* (with Jeff Chang and Casey Wong, 2023).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Historian Robin D. G. Kelley writes that Cedric Robinson, the scholar most associated with the term “racial capitalism”—see Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1983)—first encountered the term as it was used by European intellectuals to describe South Africa’s apartheid economics. Robinson not only critiqued Marx for his inability to account for the nature of radical movements outside of Europe, but he argued that Marx also “failed to account for the racial character of capitalism.” Kelley further explains that “Robinson challenged the Marxist idea that capitalism was a revolutionary negation of feudalism. Instead, capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism.” Capitalism and racism according to Robinson, as Kelley makes clear, “did not break from the old order, but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of ‘racial capitalism’ dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide.” Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?” *Boston Review*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-introduction-race-capitalism-justice>. See also Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin’s 2017 edited collection *Futures of Black Radicalism*, which takes Robinson’s work as a point of entry to “consider the history and ongoing struggle against racial capitalism, from the roots of Black radical thought to a shared epistemology of the present political moment.” Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, eds., *Futures of Black Radicalism* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2017), 3.
- <sup>2</sup> I am eternally grateful to Boots Riley and everyone, especially Stephanie Keeney Parks and Casey Philip Wong, who helped make these events happen. All quotes from Boots Riley come from our engagement with him on November 6, 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, Mary Bucholtz, et al., “Linguistics and Race: An Interdisciplinary Approach towards an LSA Statement on Race,” *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 3 (2018): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v3i1.4303>.
- <sup>4</sup> H. Samy Alim, “Introducing Raciolinguistics: Racing Language and Linguaging Race in Hyperracial Times,” in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetta F. Ball (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

- <sup>5</sup> Arthur K. Spears, “Racism, Colorism, and Language within Their Macro Contexts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, Angela Reyes, and Paul V. Kroskrity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 47–67; and Imani Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018).
- <sup>6</sup> Boots Riley, writer and director, *Sorry to Bother You*, Annapurna Pictures, 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> See Jacqueline Rahman, *It’s a Serious Business: The Linguistic Construction of Middle-Class White Characters by African American Narrative Comedians* (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2004).
- <sup>8</sup> Riley, *Sorry to Bother You*.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry,” *Boston Review*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-sorry-not-sorry>. For Eric Lott and David Roediger on white envy of Blackness and how it relates to minstrelsy, see Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York and London: Verso Books, 1991).
- <sup>11</sup> Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is one of two other characters who use a “white voice” in the film. According to Kelley, he is a modern-day slave, who is given authority but no real power. When Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ informs Cassius that the CEO wants to meet with him, he advises Cassius: “Don’t fuck it up.” As Kelley notes, “The implication is that Black people about to ride to the top always do fuck it up—because they are unwilling to sell their souls, to shut their left eyes to the world, to accept absurdity as an inevitable consequence of the way things are.” Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry.”
- <sup>12</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*.
- <sup>13</sup> Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry.”
- <sup>14</sup> Riley, *Sorry to Bother You*.
- <sup>15</sup> Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim, “‘Whassup, homeboy?’ Joining the African Diaspora: Black English as a Symbolic Site of Identification and Language Learning,” in *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas*, ed. Sinfree Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha F. Ball, and Arthur K. Spears (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2003), 169–185.
- <sup>16</sup> H. Samy Alim, “Hearing What’s Not Said and Missing What Is: Black Language in White Public Space,” in *Intercultural Discourse and Intercultural Communication: The Essential Readings*, ed. Scott F. Kiesling and Christina Bratt Paulston (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 180–197.
- <sup>17</sup> Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa, “Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 85 (2) (2015): 166, <https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>.
- <sup>18</sup> Miyako Inoue, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>19</sup> Jonathan Rosa and Adrienne Lo, “Towards a Semiotics of Racialization: Ontologies of the Sign,” paper presented at the 114th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association,” Denver, Colorado, November 2015; Jonathan Rosa, *Looking Like*

- a *Language, Sounding Like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Angela Reyes, “Inventing Postcolonial Elites: Race, Language, Mix, Excess,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 27 (2) (2017): 210–231, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12156>; and Krystal Smalls, “Race, Language, and the Body: Towards a Theory of Racial Semiotics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 233–260.
- <sup>20</sup> *Black Linguistics*, ed. Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, and Spears; Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny, *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Toward a Critical History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); and H. Samy Alim, Django Paris, and Casey Philip Wong, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: A Critical Framework for Centering Communities,” in *Handbook of the Cultural Foundations of Learning*, ed. Na’ilah Suad Nasir, Carol D. Lee, Roy Pea, and Maxine McKinney de Royston (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2020), 261–276.
- <sup>21</sup> Spears, “Racism, Colorism, and Language within Their Macro Contexts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity.
- <sup>22</sup> Bonnie Urciuoli, “Racializing, Ethnicizing, and Diversity Discourses: The Forms May Change But the Pragmatics Stay Remarkably the Same,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 110–111. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: Viking Press, 1947); Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York and London: Verso Books, 1994); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
- <sup>23</sup> Cristine Gorski Severo and Sinfree B. Makoni, “African Languages, Race, and Colonialism: The Case of Brazil and Angola,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 153–154.
- <sup>24</sup> Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986 [1977]).
- <sup>25</sup> H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman, *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- <sup>26</sup> John Baugh, “Linguistic Profiling,” in *Black Linguistics*, ed. Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, and Spears, 155–168.
- <sup>27</sup> Flores and Rosa, “Undoing Appropriateness,” 150, emphasis mine.
- <sup>28</sup> “The oppressive ways of white folks,” in Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*, 10. See also Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America* (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>29</sup> Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk*, 346.
- <sup>30</sup> James Baldwin, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1979, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html>.
- <sup>31</sup> James Sledd, “Bi-Dialectalism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy,” *The English Journal* 58 (9) (1969): 1307–1329, <https://doi.org/10.2307/811913>.
- <sup>32</sup> Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*.

- <sup>33</sup> Alim and Smitherman, *Articulate While Black*, 191.
- <sup>34</sup> Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational Researcher* 41 (3) (2012): 93–97, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>; Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, “What Are We Seeking to Sustain through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward,” *Harvard Educational Review* 84 (1) (2014): 85–100, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.9821873k2ht16m77>; Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, eds., *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2017); and Alim, Paris, and Wong, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies.”
- <sup>35</sup> H. Samy Alim, “Critical Language Awareness in the United States: Revisiting Issues and Revising Pedagogies in a Resegregated Society,” *Educational Researcher* 34 (7) (2005): 24–31, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034007024>; and H. Samy Alim, “Critical Language Awareness,” in *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*, ed. Nancy H. Hornberger and Sandra Lee McKay (Tonawanda, N.Y.: Multilingual Matters, 2010), 205–231.
- <sup>36</sup> Alim, “Critical Language Awareness in the United States,” 24.
- <sup>37</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, Django Paris, and H. Samy Alim, “‘Where the Beat Drops’: Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Hip Hop Pedagogies,” in *Freedom Moves: Hip Hop Knowledges, Pedagogies, and Futures*, ed. H. Samy Alim, Jeff Chang, and Casey Philip Wong (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 245–268.
- <sup>38</sup> Ruth Wodak, “Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse,” in *Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Jef Verschueren, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jan Blommaert (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), 204.
- <sup>39</sup> Norman Fairclough, “The Appropriacy of Appropriateness,” in *Critical Discourse Awareness*, ed. Norman Fairclough (London: Longman, 1992), 233–252.
- <sup>40</sup> Carol D. Lee, “An Ecological Framework for Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy,” in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*, ed. Paris and Alim, 261–273. See also Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).