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# **Politics of Language & (mis)education in the U.S. & — the Carribean —**

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# Takeaways

- The past influences our perceptions
- Ebonics and its Controversy
  - Origins & Implications
- Education in America Today

# The fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism - DeGraff

Scholars of Créole and linguistics continue to base their studies on assumptions that were based on race theories that attempted to assert that Europeans were superior.

Race theories during the time when academia was blossoming affected many of the core assumptions in the social sciences and linguistics in an effort to promote the ideology that “Caucasians are best” (Popkin 1974:152).

Creole is considered a dodo language (DeGraff p554), is not allowed to grow/improve because it is looked down upon even by the people who speak it, many even believe it is a limiting factor to the success of its speakers.

# Where do we see this today?

We still see many examples within institutions where oppressive/ disenfranchising ideologies are maintained just like how certain practices associated with non-caucasian races are looked down upon or considered inferior e.g.

- Creole as a language of instruction
- Religions (e.g. Islam, Vodou)
- Hip Hop/Rap music (Despite its incredible popularity)



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# Roberts: *Language and Literacy in Schools*

- Slave children were only sent to school for two years (if they were at all) and “it was regarded as a concession and a privilege” (242)
- “To a racial minority, faced with racial discrimination, education brought no discernible benefits and illiteracy no detriments; race carried an independent influence” (260).
- School to Prison Pipeline

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# Poor Quality of Education

- Disregarding other languages and dialects in schools:
  - “There was not always accurate communication between teacher and pupil, since the two did not speak the same language... ‘As soon as I perfectly understood the negro dialect, I commenced a regular system of instruction’ [-Mrs. Carmichael]” (241)
- Lowering the level of education based on the assumption that certain populations cannot achieve high literacy levels
- “The absence of comment about the learners’ understanding of the material and the repetition of emphasis on the ‘accent’” (249)
- Worse schools in inner cities
  - Amphibious Achievement

Image of Boston Public School demographics removed due to copyright restrictions.

# Questions:

- Inheriting knowledge from the past comes with the danger of us taking for granted many of the core assumptions made. As MIT students, how have we taken core assumptions that may be based off oppressive ideologies in our education for granted?
- Roberts says that achieving higher levels of education makes disenfranchised people more aware of their marginalization without truly being able to help them. How can we turn this around and use education to help oppressed groups gain power (especially younger students in middle and high schools, because this is the age when they decide to go to college or when they could be caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline)?
- How do we work to help students obtain greater fluency & mastery of the “dominant linguistic norms,” when adopting standard english while embracing white culture is at the expense of their personal and vernacular cultural identity?

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