UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

"No longer invisible, I stand Black and Deaf": Maintenance of the American Black Deaf Community and the Linguistic Racialization of Black Deaf Youth

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by

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2019

The Thesis of Alicia M. Wright is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

DEDICATION

To my dad for asking the hard questions;

To my siblings for showing me the right way;

To my friends for getting me out of my own head;

And to my Love for your support, comfort, and unwavering belief.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"No longer invisible, I stand Black and Deaf":
Maintenance of the American Black Deaf Community and the Linguistic Racialization of Black Deaf Youth

by

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

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Professor John B. Haviland, Chair

According to Black deaf researchers, Black Deaf communities in North America are defined by a complex interplay of historical, racial, and audiological pressures. In this thesis, I analyze Black Deaf literature, documentaries, archival material, and my own ethnographic data to detail these pressures. I focus on the sociohistorical construction of North American Black Deaf communities, community maintenance strategies, and the role of Black ASL, with a spotlight on Northern Black Deaf communities. Black Deaf communities in the United States

consolidated during the racially segregated pre-civil rights era. Through the creation of various cultural institutions, these communities consistently renegotiated their boundaries to withstand the rapid, but insufficient, changes of the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights eras. As a result of racial integration, a rise in mainstreaming deaf children, and media and communication related technological advancements, I argue that a great pressure was placed on Black Deaf youth to adhere to established regimes of Blackness and Deafness, which is reflected in the observed language changes amongst Black deaf youth in the Southern, U.S.

Introduction

Dr. Glenn B. Anderson, the first Black deaf Gallaudet alumnus to earn a doctoral degree, describes the Black Deaf community in the U.S. as people who reside in a "hearing and color-conscious society" (Anderson 1972 [quoted in Aramburo 1989, 103]). More specifically, the Black Deaf community is partially defined by a complex interplay of historical, racial, and audiological pressures. Utilizing Black Deaf literature, documentaries, archival materials, and my own ethnographic research, I explore the sociohistorical construction and maintenance of Black Deaf communities and Black American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States. I ask: what role does language have in the construction and maintenance of Black Deaf communities in North America? First, I argue that Black Deaf communities, formed during an era of legally mandated racial segregation, marked new community boundaries to withstand the rapidly changing and disconcerting reality of post-Civil Rights America. Secondly, the competing pressures to adhere to regimes of Blackness and Deafness, after racial integration and an increase in mainstreaming in schools, are reflected in the language changes of Black deaf southern youth.

I begin with a brief explanation of relevant terms and demographics for the Deaf community in the United States. Next, I move on to a description of my method and data, after which I provide a short introduction to the theoretical foundations. In *Language and the North American Deaf Community*, I offer a brief history of the formation of the mainstream Deaf community and ASL. Next, in *Schools, Clubs, and National Black Deaf Advocates*, I provide a detailed description of the sociohistorical reality that gave rise to Black Deaf communities. Additionally, I explore how Black Deaf communities maintained and renegotiated community boundaries in response to significant but insufficient social change. In the final main section, *The*

Role of Language, I summarize the research on Black ASL to explain how language change in the younger generation of Black deaf signers is a product of a process of dual racialization.

Deaf vs deaf/Hearing vs hearing

Before delving deeper, I move to a discussion of terminology unique to Deaf studies. At the 1975 Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, sociolinguist James Woodward presented an argument for depathologizing deafness. He instead took a theoretical turn towards the legitimization of a culturally unique North American Deaf community. Woodward suggested using *Deaf* (with a capital D) when referencing the sociocultural aspects of being deaf, similar to how the names of national and ethnic groups are capitalized (e.g. Italians) (De Meulder, Kusters, and O'Brien 2017). This suggestion was adopted by most people in Deaf studies and taken to the extreme. Soon, the difference between *Deaf* and *deaf* became a distinction between signing deaf people and non-signing deaf people who wore hearing aids and maintained the medical-pathological view of deafness, "rather than just biologically deaf (as in not being able to hear)" (13). De Meulder et al. (2017) highlight two main issues with the *deaf/Deaf* distinction. First, it creates an oversimplified dichotomy of a group that includes a complex array of identities and language practices. Secondly, applying *Deaf* to deaf people in history or outside of an Anglo-Saxon western context is anachronistic and ethnocentric. Instead, the authors note, many scholars use *deaf* for individual people and *Deaf* when referring to sociocultural entities and/or established theoretical concepts (e.g. Deaf community or Deaf culture). In this sense, *deaf* is used to describe all types of deaf people "including those who are hard of hearing" (15). However, the distinction between *deaf* and *Deaf*, as defined above, cannot always be neatly separated. To address this complex interplay of *deaf* and *Deaf* some scholars

have adopted *d/Deaf* to "denote and highlight the often inherently mixed nature of the audiological and sociocultural conditions" (Senghas and Monaghan 2002, 72).

Analogous to *Deaf/deaf* is the *Hearing/hearing* distinction which are terms not often used by the same scholars who prefer the former. This lack of consistency, Senghas and Monaghan (2002) note, is because the *Hearing/hearing* distinction is not a difference of which hearing people are generally aware. However, American Sign Language (ASL) has an expression, glossed as HEARING-THINKING or HEARING-IN-THE-HEAD, that reveals a distinction between *hearing*, signifying an audiological ability, and *Hearing*, referring to a "hearing-identified society and culture and by extension, mainstream society and culture" (72; parentheses removed). Additionally, like the *Deaf/deaf* dichotomy, *Hearing* and *hearing* cannot always be easily separated. For the reasons described above, and following Senghas and Monaghan, I will use *Deaf* and *Hearing* when emphasizing the sociocultural aspects of being deaf or the established theoretical concepts; *deaf* and *hearing* when referring to individuals; and *d/Deaf* and *h/Hearing* when referring to the complex interaction of the sociocultural and audiological circumstances and their conceptualizations.

Demographics

How many deaf people reside in the U.S.? Unfortunately, this question does not have a simple answer. Due to the different definitions of *deaf* and *hard of hearing* that are employed by different demographers, government agencies, and social scientists, estimates can vary widely. In 2005, the Gallaudet Research Institute (GRI) provided an independent analysis of the available U.S. census data to explain why decent estimates for the number of deaf and hard of hearing people are difficult to come by. In their analysis, the GRI considers two national household surveys conducted by the U.S. federal government: the Survey of Income and Program

Participation (SIPP) and the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). SIPP is a continuous series of national panels in which each panel features a representative sample of people residing in the U.S. who are interviewed over a four-year period. This survey covers a wide variety of topics related to economic well-being, including 'disability'. Based on data from the 2001 SIPP survey, GRI estimated that:

> Across all age groups, in the United States, approximately 1,000,000 people (0.38% of the population, or 3.8 per 1,000) over 5 years of age are "*functionally deaf*;" more than half are over 65 years of age. About 8,000,000 people (3.7%) over 5 years of age are *hard of hearing (that is, have some difficulty hearing normal conversation even with the use of a hearing aid)*. Again, more than half of those who are hard of hearing are over 65 years of age. We emphasize that these estimates are based upon self-reported (or informant-reported) hearing difficulty and not on independent audiometric measurements [emphasis added] (Mitchell 2005).

NHIS, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), is based on personal household interviews and concerns numerous different health topics, including hearing status. Based on data from the NHIS surveys from 1997-2003, GRI estimated that:

> Across all age groups, approximately 600,000 people in the United States (0.22% of the population, or 2.2 per 1,000) are "*deaf*;" more than half are over 65 years of age. About 6,000,000 people (2.2%) report having "*a lot of trouble*" hearing with, again, more than half over 65 years of age. Over 28,000,000 people (10%) report having "*a little trouble*" hearing with just less than a third over 65 years of age, but more than half over 45 years of age. Altogether, more than 35,000,000 people (13%) report *some degree of hearing trouble*. Again, we emphasize that these estimates are based upon self-reported (or informant-reported) hearing trouble and not on independent audiometric measurements [emphasis added] (Mitchell 2005).

As evidenced by the GRI's analysis, *deaf* and *hard of hearing* are defined differently depending on the survey, making comparisons between data or accurate estimates difficult. However, laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act rely on demographic data to ensure the intended population is being properly served. To this end, the U.S. Census Bureau publishes "Americans With Disabilities" reports based on SIPP survey data. In the most recent report, the U.S. Census estimated that 7.1 percent of the population had "[s]erious

difficulty hearing" with 1.4 percent of the population identifying as "deaf" (Taylor 2018, 21).

To complicate matters further, there are no federal surveys that include questions of language use or Deaf cultural affiliation in their census questions. As such, there is only one survey available that offers any sort of answer to how many people use ASL. Based on data from a 1972 study conducted as part of the larger, now defunct, National Census of the Deaf Population project, the GRI estimated that about 500,000 people (~0.24% of the population) said that they used signing in their home and were self-reported "good" signers. Of this group, 280,000 identified themselves as deaf (~0.14% of the population). However, the GRI also expanded their analysis to include those persons who self-reported themselves as "fair" or "poor" signers which resulted in an estimated 642,000 people (~.31% of the population) who used sign language at home. Of this group, 375,000 (~0.19 of the population) identified as "deaf". The GRI notes that, assuming the proportions have remained roughly the same, the number of deaf signers would be around 360,000 to 517,000 today. However, deaf Americans' circumstances have drastically changed since the 1970s, so this estimate is just that, an estimate, based on a rather large assumption and not on any new data. This is all to say that an adequate estimate of how many deaf signers reside in the United States is not currently available.

Methods and Data

I focus my analysis on three areas: Deaf documentaries, archival documents, and my own ethnographic research from a Black Deaf Advocates regional conference, all of which will be supplemented by literature about Black deaf people. The Deaf documentaries I have chosen are 20th Century Chicago Stories: deaf lives and experiences and Nathie: no hand-me downs. 20th Century Chicago Stories is a compilation of narratives told by deaf people in Chicago. I

concentrate my analysis on two narratives: “Lincoln Club of the Deaf” an interview with Glenn Anderson and “Deaf Postal Employees” an interview with Willie May Boyce. Anderson tells the story of his basketball career from high school through college and about his life in between. Boyce talks about her life growing up at a residential school in Illinois and her experience obtaining a job at and working for the United States Postal Service. Nathie: no hand-me downs is a compilation of observations and stories by Nathie Marbury. These short stories range from her issues communicating with her hearing family to recognizing her identity as a Black Deaf person. I analyze narratives, accounts or stories of connected events (real or imaginary), because they are found in nearly every community and “have diverse functions” (Hill 2005, 160). For instance, dinner-table narratives between middle-class American families can be used to “enact implicit gendered hierarchies” or seemingly unrelated events and observations can be made meaningful through narrating to create certain ‘selves’ (160-161). Narratives are “not merely overtly ‘about’ some ‘content,’ such as what happened when, where, and to whom” but they also “make public the covert underlying presuppositions that organize the worlds in which speakers live” (157). In this sense, these stories – in addition to the context in which the narrative is being told, who is doing the telling, and who the audience is – offer us a glimpse into how different Black deaf people conceptualize and interact with their Black Deaf community.

The archival materials are programs from National Black Deaf Advocate regional and national conferences and information on the first “Black Deaf Experience Day” event held at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. My reasons for using archival conference material are threefold: availability, the importance of creating welcoming meeting places for socializing and community building in the North American Deaf community, and the sociohistorical perspective in which I frame my arguments. Firstly, these conferences are preplanned, organized, formal

spaces in which Black deaf people, their families, and their allies come together, temporarily, to discuss, network, and socialize. By formal, I mean what Judith Irvine terms *the first aspect of formality*: "the addition of extra rules or conventions to the codes that organize behavior in a social setting" (Irvine 1979, 776). As such, conferences produce material such as programs, descriptions, flyers, etc. to advertise their events. Thanks to the Gallaudet University Archives, these material objects are available to the public. Secondly, conferences are an example of the importance of meeting places to the Deaf community, however temporary. Senghas and Monaghan (2002) argue that finding and forming places to meet and socialize has, historically, been an important goal for many deaf persons in the U.S. Lastly, I am interested in the sociohistorical foundations of the Black Deaf community and Black ASL and archival material, by definition, is useful historical source material.

Finally, my data also include observations from a Midwestern Regional Black Deaf Advocates Conference I attended in August of 2018. The conference, entitled "It Starts with Us", was a three-day meeting held in Indianapolis, Indiana and hosted by the Indiana Chapter of Black Deaf Advocates. One of the goals of this conference, according to the Conference Chair, was for attendees to leave the conference "better equipped to help the Black Deaf and Hard of Hearing community as well as yourself" (Vaughn 2018). The workshop presentation I consider dealt with the history, language, and leaders of the Black Deaf community in the U.S.

Theoretical Foundations

Community, broadly defined, can refer to people who share the same location (neighborhood, town, state, nation, etc.), particular characteristic(s) or history, common interests, or some combination of these aspects. North American Black Deaf communities, as Dr. Anderson asserts, are unified by a combination of shared characteristics, history, and to a lesser

extent, locations. However, this simple description of Black Deaf communities does not ascertain how they were formed and maintained over the years. Anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen (1985) characterizes community as “a phenomenon of culture: as one, therefore, which is meaningfully constructed by people through their symbolic prowess and resources” (Cohen 1985, 38). The construction and maintenance of a community is inherently tied to its boundaries. Cohen argues it is when people encounter others that they become the most conscious of their own community. However, drastic social change can result in a weakening of the structural bases of a community, he continues, which is when symbolic behavior is increasingly relied upon to remake the community boundaries. As I will later describe, Black Deaf communities solidified during the era of legal racial segregation (pre-Civil Rights), but with great social change came a new form of uncertainty leading Black Deaf communities either to transform or reaffirm their communities’ boundaries through the formation of new cultural institutions. However, I will not go so far as to agree with Cohen’s argument that community solely “exists in the minds of its members” (Ibid., 98).

Instead, taking my cue from H. Samy Alim (2016), I acknowledge that the formation and maintenance of Black Deaf communities are and have been influenced by oppression and discrimination based on “race”, which “continues to covertly and overtly structure the lived experiences of millions of People of Color” (Alim 2016, 25). For Black deaf people, two intersecting racial regimes, the pressures to adhere to *Hearing Black* and *White Deaf* standards, interact in complex ways via language use. “[B]ecoming Black”, Alim argues by quoting Awad Ibrahim, “‘is to become an ethnographer who *translates* and searches around in an effort to understand what it means to be black in North America.’ It is a process of ‘entering already pronounced regimes of Blackness’” (Ibrahim 2003, 154 [quoted in Alim 2016, 2]). Ibrahim

describes becoming Black as a continuous process of exploring and deciphering an established system of Blackness to find one's own place. To be Deaf is to adhere to a "White-dominated ASL and Deaf culture" (Fernandes and Myers 2009, 23). At first, Black Deaf communities' boundaries were, partially, maintained for them through racially and audiologically segregated spaces. However, the racial integration of schools and then the increasing trend in mainstreaming Deaf youth interrupted these old forms of community boundaries resulting not only in new boundaries being formed but an increase pressure to adhere to regimes of Hearing Blackness and white Deafness.

Language and the North American Deaf Community

Scholars cannot discuss the formation of the Deaf Community in the U.S. without mentioning the formation of American Sign Language (ASL); the two go hand-in-hand. In this section, I provide a brief general history of the formation of the mainstream Deaf community and ASL in the United States. Scholars of Deaf U.S. history often trace the beginnings of the mainstream Deaf community to the establishment of the first residential school for the deaf, the American School for the Deaf (ASD). Originally named the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, ASD was established in 1816[1]. ASL, which is related to the French Sign Language brought to ASD by their first Deaf teacher, is also thought to have consolidated at this school.[2]

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[1] *Dumb*, meaning unable or unwilling to speak, was a common term used in conjunction with Deaf before the mid-1800s. The rise of Deaf education, and subsequently a Deaf community and culture in the 19th century, lead to a decline in the use of *dumb.* Today, this term is considered archaic and even offensive.

[2] Many deaf people who went to ASD brought their own home sign and local signs systems which contributed to the formation of ASL. For instance, people from Martha's Vineyard were some of the earliest students of the school. For around 200 years (late-1700s till 1952) Martha's Vineyard experienced a high prevalence of genetic deafness leading to a large deaf population. In one town on the Island, the average number of deaf people was 1:25 by the middle of the 1800s (Groce 1985). Due to the high rate of genetic deafness, a unique sign language developed on the Island which was widely used by both deaf and hearing people.

The American School for the Deaf (ASD) was founded by three white men: Mason Fitch Cogswell, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, and Laurent Clerc. Cogswell was the father of a deaf child named Alice, Gallaudet was their neighbor turned partner in this venture, and Clerc would come into the picture later after Gallaudet returned from his travels to Europe. Cogswell, a wealthy and well-connected physician residing in Connecticut, used his network to raise money for the new school. Gallaudet, a sickly but zealous protestant minister, attempted to teach Alice Cogswell how to read, which motivated him to assist in Cogswell's fundraising efforts for the deaf school. Gallaudet helped Cogswell raise enough money for Gallaudet to travel to Europe to learn the methods used by European countries in the instruction of the deaf. In the summer of 1815 and, after an unsuccessful trip to England and Scotland, Gallaudet would meet Laurent Clerc. Clerc was a brilliant and successful thirty-three-year-old deaf teacher at the Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris (currently the National Institute for Deaf Children of Paris). He and Gallaudet would return to the U.S. in the summer of 1816 to help Cogswell open ASD.

Van Cleve and Crouch list four important features of the American School for the Deaf that "established a pattern of deaf education that remained dominant in the United States until long after the Civil War" (29). Firstly, since the incidence of deafness was low in the general population, this school, and the ones that would quickly open in the following years, had to serve people from a wide geographical area and were, thus, residential. The deaf students spent more time in these residential schools and with other deaf children than with their own family or geographical community. Additionally, their varying degrees of deafness impeded their participation in the process of spoken language acquisition/socialization for those born to hearing non-signing parents. Instead, language was passed from older deaf signing students, and signing teachers/caretakers/supervisors, to younger students. Secondly, the way ASD would eventually

be financed would set it apart from previous patterns of deaf education: as something only available to the wealthy. In May of 1816, one month after ASD opened its doors, the state of Connecticut granted ASD monies from government funds. State funding allowed ASD to function without relying on donations or charging high tuition, which allowed deaf children from poorer families to attend ASD, as well. This change to state funding truly made ASD the first public educational institution for the Deaf in the U.S.

The last two vital features are connected. From its inception, ASD emphasized the use of sign language and hired many deaf teachers. Van Cleve and Crouch note, "[i]ndeed, the person initially hired to teach all the other instructors at the American School was himself deaf, and the school actively recruited its best students to become instructors after they graduated" (Ibid.). This method of education was in line with that of the Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris, but in opposition to the deaf schools established by the Braidwood family in Edinburgh, Scotland in the late 18th century. The Edinburgh school emphasized learning speech and only used minimal sign language in service to that end. The residential organization of the school, its state funding sources, the emphasis on sign language, and the plethora of deaf teachers not only set a pattern for other North American Deaf schools that followed but also laid the groundwork for the formation of the mainstream North American Deaf community and American Sign Language. "Colored" students were not accepted into ASD until 1825, with most of the small number of "colored" students coming from the surrounding New England States.

By 1843, the number of residential Deaf schools grew to 7 with New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, and Indiana all opening at least one school (a couple of which were schools for the deaf and blind). By 1857, the number of states with residential deaf schools grew to 19 with all being in the eastern half of the country except the schools in

Missouri, Iowa, Louisiana, and Texas. During these early decades, the goals of these institutions were quite similar. They all emphasized the use of signs and, for the most part, academic subjects were limited to "reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989, 71). Rather, these early schools focused on vocational training for students. This would eventually change, however. The white deaf students that graduated from the early residential schools often became teachers themselves and either stayed at their home institutions or helped establish other residential deaf schools in different states. Black deaf teachers were few and far between with the earliest known teachers being Julius Carrett and Amanda Johnson who were hired by the Institute for Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Colored Youth in Austin, Texas in 1887 (Stapleton 2014). Additionally, from these schools arose the first Deaf clubs in or near cities.

In 1864, the Collegiate Department of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, today known as Gallaudet University, was opened. It was the first and, for about 100 years after its inception, the only college especially made for deaf students. Once Gallaudet University was opened, often "those who identified with the deaf community and supplied its leadership were products of the Gallaudet experiences" (73). Additionally, beginning in the late nineteenth century, graduates from Gallaudet monopolized leadership positions in national deaf organizations, produced important journals, magazines, and newspapers, and they made up a majority of America's deaf teachers. Gallaudet did not only dominate the social sphere. The language used at Gallaudet, "Gallaudet signs", was taken for granted as the standard American Sign Language (Croneberg, 1976 [originally published in 1965]).

I've laid out this brief history to show the speed at which deaf education, and a subsequent Deaf community emerged, and to illustrate how influential these early schools were to the Deaf community and the structure and transmission ASL to this day. Additionally, we see

that the standard history of Deaf education in the U.S. (and the history of the formation of the mainstream North American Deaf community) was overwhelmingly white. The exclusion of non-white stories is indicative of a widespread tendency in Deaf studies, writings about deaf people, and studies of ASL. Jane K. Fernandes and Shirley Shultz Myers (2009) write, "[t]he language and culture of White Deaf Americans [especially white Deaf native signers] have been the standard against which deaf Americans of color and all other deaf people are measured" (Fernandes and Myers 2009, 23). Other forms of signing such as the combination of English and ASL, the tactile signing of Deaf-Blind people (Pro-Tactile ASL), or the interaction of American Sign Language and Spanish, just to name a few, "are, at best, called dialects and, at worst, wrong or impossible" (19). The history of academic studies, both explicitly and implicitly, upholding white Deaf native signers as the standard of Deaf culture and ASL resulted in the exclusion of the language and cultural norms of communities of d/Deaf people of color (among other d/Deaf groups).

In the following section, I heed Fernandes and Myers' call for more research "into the signing and culture(s) of various deaf Americans of color" and re-explore the history of the Deaf community in America, shifting attention to the experiences of Black deaf people (23). Additionally, I pay special attention to experiences and narratives from Northern Black Deaf people to augment the Black Deaf literature, which has mostly been based on Black Deaf southerners.

Schools, Clubs, and National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA)

In this section, I investigate the sociohistorical contexts underlying the formation and maintenance of Black Deaf communities and a Black southern way of signing. I highlight schools, Deaf clubs, and state and national advocacy organizations because these institutions

have served and continue to serve as important spaces for community building and language formation in the Deaf community. I argue that the Black deaf community arose out of the post-Civil War segregation policies. However, the unexpected uncertainties of integration and the post-Civil Rights era blurred the previous segregationist boundaries of the Black Deaf community. No longer legally relegated to segregated spaces, at least directly, Black deaf people created their own cultural institutions in order to redefine their Black Deaf communities.

Schools

Since an abundance of the literature on Deaf school segregation is based on schools in the southern states, that is where I will begin. After the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the ratification of the 13th amendment in 1865, which formally abolished slavery in the United States, the former Confederate states experienced an era of reconstruction (1865-1877). During this time, the Republican party attempted to address the inequalities faced by former slaves and to deal with issues that arose from the Confederacy being readmitted to the Union. It was also during this brief era that Black people made great advances in the social and political arenas. This political revolution birthed such breakthroughs as the 14th and 15th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted, on paper, equal citizenship and voting rights to freed Black people, respectively (if they were men). However, as the 1800s came to a close, Reconstruction era policies spawned growing violent opposition from white southerners, and laws and policies enforcing racial segregation in Southern states drastically increased. These Black Codes established racial segregation between whites and persons of color, originally, on public transportation and in schools. The laws were quickly extended to restaurants, theatres, parks, cemeteries, and other public spaces. In 1898, the Black codes were upheld by the U.S. Supreme court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* enshrining a "separate but equal" doctrine into national law.

Deaf schools "belatedly reflected the changing attitudes in American Society" and some educators attempted to educate Black deaf students alongside white deaf students despite contemporary society's attitudes and laws concerning racial segregation (McCaskill et al. 2011, 17). Unsurprisingly, however, Black deaf people faced the same racial discrimination as Black hearing people at this time. Between 1857 and 1938, eleven former confederate states, six border states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) established separate but equal education facilities for "colored" deaf children.[3] Only in D.C. were separate "colored" facilities created during the same year as the establishment of the white deaf school. For every other Southern or border state, establishment of a separate facility for Black deaf children ranged from 4 to 86 years after the establishment of the white deaf school. There were also numerous day schools and day classes in public school for the Black deaf children. Desegregation of these grade schools did not begin until the mid-1950s, during the Civil Rights movement, with the earliest date of desegregation being 1954 and the last school not being integrated until 1978 (in Louisiana).

The conditions in these separate schools, like many facilities for Black people during this time, were subpar. During the early years of Black deaf education in the South, the number of Black and white teachers, both hearing and deaf, was mixed (McCaskill et al. 2011, 23). However, as the years progressed, fewer and fewer Black teachers were being hired at Black deaf schools. Finding Black teachers that were properly educated and trained in Deaf education was difficult due to the scarcity of educational and training opportunities available to Black people, in general. Consequently, the Black teachers that were hired to instruct Black Deaf children often lacked the necessary education and experience, with some not even knowing how

[3] The former confederate states were Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The border states were Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland.

to sign (Ibid.). Beyond the teachers, instruction administered at the Black Deaf schools emphasized vocational training over academics. Although an emphasis on vocational training was common amongst Deaf schools in general, the emphasis placed on this sort of skill-based training was especially strong and prolonged in Black Deaf schools. Very few Black Deaf schools even offered diplomas to their students upon completion of study (Hairston and Smith 1983). Both the strong emphasis on vocational training and the lack of access to a diploma had the unfortunate effect of depriving or denying Black deaf students the chance to progress beyond a secondary education.

Exclusion based on race was not limited to K-12 residential schools. Gallaudet University, located in D.C., began as the National Deaf-Mute College. This College was, originally, a collegiate department in the Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and the Dumb and the Blind in 1864. In 1885, the grade school and college department were separated, and the lower school was renamed the Kendall School for the Deaf. At first, beginning around 1867, Black deaf students were allowed to attend the Kendall school (Maley 1990). It is unclear, however, if Black deaf students were ever allowed to enroll in the collegiate department prior to integration or if it was always segregated. Either way, in 1905 official school policy changed to exclude Black deaf students from the grade school and these children were moved to the Maryland School for the Colored Deaf-Mutes (Gallaudet University Archives). It wasn't until 1952 that Black deaf students could attend both the Kendall School and Gallaudet University, although classes, dining halls, and living spaces were still segregated until 1958. At the Kendall School, between 1952 and 1958, white teachers refused to teach the newly admitted Black deaf students. Therefore, Black teachers who had graduated from local Black colleges

were hired to teach them.[4] Instruction of Black deaf students took place in the "ole jim", the first gymnasium built on Gallaudet campus in 1881, and interaction with the white deaf students and white teachers was severely limited (Maley 1990).

The differences between the Northern and Southern U.S. concerning racial segregation in deaf schools are tied to the differences between their slavery and racial segregation laws.[5] As previously explained, public education for white Deaf Americans began in 1816 in Hartford, Connecticut with the establishment of the American School for the Deaf (ASD). ASD did not begin admitting Black deaf students, however, until 1825, becoming the first integrated school in Connecticut (McCaskill et al. 2011). The northern schools that opened after ASD (i.e. in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio) also allowed Black deaf students to attend, so it was not uncommon for small Black deaf populations to exist in majority white northern Deaf schools. However, the post-Civil War racial segregation that reigned from the late 1800s to the 1950s was not unique to the South; racial segregation laws in northern states were just not as unified or complete. No separate schools were established for Black deaf children in the North (McCaskill et al. 2011). However, the lack of separate schools did not guarantee that Black deaf individuals had equal educational opportunities. For example, the Clarke School, an oralist deaf school in Northampton, MA, ratified their exclusion of Black students into an official school policy in 1908 (Ibid).

[4] One white teacher publicly resigned due to the integration of Black deaf students (Maley 1990).

[5] By 1804, Vermont (1777), Pennsylvania (1780), Massachusetts (1783), New Hampshire (1783), Connecticut (1784), Rhode Island (1784), New York (1799) and New Jersey (1804) passed laws abolishing slavery, some immediately and some gradually. In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, which later became the states of Ohio (in 1803), Indiana (in 1816), Illinois (in 1818), Michigan (in 1837), and Wisconsin (in 1848). U.S. Congress banned the importation of slaves in 1808 and, in 1820-21, it banned slavery north of the Mason-Dixon line. The above-mentioned states were, technically, "free".

The racial segregation in Deaf schools in northern states was more of motley nature. Boyce, who attended the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD) in Jacksonville, IL beginning in the 1930s, recalls a "frustrating and depressing" upbringing because of the racial oppression she encountered at ISD (Boyce 2005). While Black and white students were taught and interacted in the same classes and during play time, students' living quarters and dining areas were racially segregated. She mentions that the teachers were "alright", but there was a housemother who was "just terrible and very discriminatory" toward Black students (Ibid.). This housemother acted as a racial segregation monitor, warning white children away from interacting with the Black students.

Black codes enforced by external organizations and cities also bled into Black deaf student's experiences at these majority white Deaf schools. Boyce recalls how she was barred from joining the local Girl Scout troupe and the Mutual Improvement Society because of her Blackness. In fact, Boyce left ISD after her Junior year because she would come to learn that ISD was going to have their graduation of 1945 in the Dunlap Hotel located in downtown Jacksonville. She was not going to be able to attend her own high school graduation due to the segregation policies of downtown Jacksonville, IL. Fed up with the segregation and exclusion she faced during her time at ISD, Boyce left in 1944.

The North American Deaf communities' naming practices were once racially motivated, as well. Name signs in American Sign Language are signs used as people's names within the North American Deaf community (and with hearing allies). These name signs refer to specific people and are typically initialized (the handshape is the letter of the person's first or last name). Name signs can be either descriptive or arbitrary. Descriptive name signs reflect a particular characteristic of a person's appearance, personality, or behaviour at the time of naming and

arbitrary name signs “consist only of the initial letter(s) of the first or last name, with movement and in a specific location” (Mindess 1990, 3). Anthropologists Barbara Bodenhorn and Gabriele Vom Bruck (2006) assert that since we are usually named by others, we are implicated into a social matrix – “entangled…in the life histories of others” – that not only delineates “the boundaries of social status” but may also bridge them (3). Racially motivated name signs were another tool that the dominant white society used to subjugate Black people. In Boyce’s case, her name sign is located on her nose which shares the same sign location as the, now obsolete, sign for NEGRO. The interviewer specifically asks Boyce why her name sign is located on the nose and she responds “[a]ll deaf black boys and girls had name signs which included this sign for Negro (touching the nose) followed by the remaining part of their name signs. Nowadays that does not occur anymore, “Black” name signs are similar to “White” name signs and the name sign does not identify one by skin color” (Boyce 2005).

The racially segregated reality of this era not only laid the foundation for the development of a Black way of signing that was recognizably different from the signing of white deaf people, at least in the South, but also gave rise to Black Deaf communities in the North and South. Black Deaf residentials schools “nourished the foundations” of the North American Black Deaf community by producing deaf adults “who shared a common language and similar experiences” (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989, 47). The ties formed at these segregated facilities and schools continued well into adulthood.

Deaf Clubs

Deaf social clubs were a continuation of the alliances formed in the segregated Deaf schools. For both Black and white people, these Deaf clubs were an important milieu of community maintenance. However, these too were highly segregated spaces. Hairston and Smith

(1983) describe deaf clubs as "the deaf person's second home…the club is the heart of the deaf community" (37). At one point in time, nearly every major city in the U.S. was home to a Deaf club (Padden 2007). These clubs served as the main way that deaf adults could come together to chat, form relationships, socialize, and exchange local gossip and news. Club social events ranged from poker games to dances to sports tournaments. Early community leaders were formed in these clubs. Padden (2007) argues that the rise and decline of these social clubs was due to the changing tides in jobs before, during, and after World War II (WWII). According to her argument, the decline of deaf clubs was not the result of technological advances, as some would argue, but the result of economic and industry changes after WWII, which, ironically enough, was the same reason for the growth of Deaf clubs in the first place. Leaving their "artisan-type jobs" for the ever expending "factory-type labor" during WWII, "Deaf men and women left their homes and relocated where there was likely to be work": urban areas (6). It was in these urban areas, flooded with Deaf workers and their families, that most Deaf clubs began and thrived. This history posited by Padden is not, however, the full story. In fact, numerous Black and women focused Deaf clubs began in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of Civil Rights and Second Wave Feminism movements.

Like the schools that gave rise to their membership, Deaf clubs were racially segregated. The reasons behind this segregation were twofold. Firstly, Padden briefly describes how many white Deaf clubs did not allow Black deaf men or women (of any color) to be members, which was carried over from racially segregated schooling. For example, the Washington Silent Society, a well-known Black Deaf club established shortly after WWII, was formed, in part, due to Black deaf people being banned from joining the District of Columbia Association of the Deaf (Hairston and Smith 1983). Secondly, a deep divide in employment opportunities also affected

the racial makeup of clubs. For instance, Goodyear Aircraft, a manufacturing company that made aircrafts for the war effort, hired workers in large numbers and this included deaf people. Deaf people moved to take advantage of these hiring opportunities and, as result, formed several Deaf clubs in Ohio and New Jersey. However, Goodyear was not in the habit of hiring Black people. Instead, Padden writes, "black Deaf workers migrating to Ohio found employment in the World Publishing Company, which printed Bibles" and these workers would soon form a Black Deaf club for men and women known as the Cincinnati Charter Club (Padden 2007, 9). These clubs remained mostly segregated during much of their existence. Another well-known Black deaf club, the Lincoln Club for the Deaf in Chicago, IL, was segregated well into the 1980s when it was disbanded.

Founded in 1945, Anderson gives us a glimpse into the Lincoln Club for the Deaf during the 1960s when he played for their competitive basketball team. Anderson, who joined the Lincoln Club's basketball team when he was a senior in high school, recalled that "only a few white deaf people came to our events" (Paul 2005). Anderson attributes the lack of integration to white people not feeling "comfortable socializing with black people in the club" because "the whites and blacks didn't grow up together, and we attended different schools" (Ibid.). However, he did acknowledge that many Black deaf members of the Lincoln Club would go to deaf activities in the white deaf community. This club, like many others, also traveled and competed in sporting tournaments throughout the nation. Anderson recalls participating in a Basketball tournament in Dayton, OH in 1964 where, since he was underage at the time, he had to play under the name of an adult member of the Lincoln Club. These highly segregated deaf clubs were an important milieu in which Black Deaf communities traveled, socialized, and maintained community boundaries.

In the decades following the end of the war, factory jobs were shut down and Deaf workers moved into other occupations. Until the 1970s printing remained a viable field of employment. Competing opportunities in the professional sector due to new federal job programs aimed at minorities arose in the 1960s (Padden 2007, 9-10). Padden argues:

> As Deaf men and women moved to the professional class, the working class became less broad, and became divided between those who joined the professional class and those who remained in the trades. The split affected membership in clubs as well, as the professional class moved on to other kinds of associations…New organizations recognizing gender, race, and ethnicity formed a different social dimension, moving from the local to the national level: the Black Deaf Advocates, the National Asian Deaf Congress, the Deaf Latino Conference, the Jewish Deaf Congress, and Deaf Women United (11).

Most Deaf clubs declined and, in their place, rose special interest state and national organizations many of whom were created to address issues of race and gender. However, it may be tempting to argue that these social clubs turned into these new organizations, but that would be misleading. Instead, in the case of the Black Deaf communities, the creation of a national advocacy organization was in reaction to the integration of schools and the decline of racially segregated spaces, like Deaf clubs.

National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA)

The formation of the National Black Deaf Advocates was a "recognition and reassertion" of the Black Deaf community's boundaries in a time of intense social change (Cohen 1985, 86). The American Civil Rights movement, a large and collective protest movement against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States, rose to national prominence in the early 1950s. Leaders, protesters, and allies of this movement called for an end to the "separate but equal" laws and Black code policies that existed throughout the nation. This movement resulted in several gains for American Black people. In 1952, in *Miller v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, a federal district court in D.C. "ruled that Black deaf children had the right

to attend the Kendall School" (McCaskill et al. 2011, 18). Two years later, in the 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. supreme court ruled that racially segregated schools were to be abolished because they were inherently unequal and violated the "'equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment" (Warren 1954). In 1964, U.S. legislature passed the Civil Rights Act which was aimed at ending discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. These rulings and laws resulted in the desegregation of Deaf schools between 1954 and 1978. Black deaf people were legally allowed to attend Gallaudet University and to become members of the National Association of the Deaf, which legally barred Black people from membership since 1925. Legal segregation of publics spaces also came to end during this era. Unfortunately, signaled by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, the momentum of the civil rights movement was all but halted in the 1970s and 1980s. This was due, in part, to increase cries of reverse discrimination by white people and government crackdowns on Black "militant" groups.

The National Black Deaf Advocates was established to "promote leadership" within the Black Deaf community as an organization where Black deaf people could "share experiences, ideas, talents, and hopes" (NBDA). Throughout 1980, several overlapping groups of Black deaf people met with different mainstream Deaf organizations to promote the needs of the Black Deaf community. The first meeting involved a Black deaf group in D.C. and a Deaf advocacy organization called Deaf Pride. This group met with Deaf Pride to express "their concerns about the problems that prevent [the] Black deaf from achieving their potential and the lack of leadership in the Black deaf community nationwide" (Ibid.). The second group came together as a Back Deaf Caucus during the 100th anniversary convention of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) to address issues such as "the NAD's refusal to address the concerns of the black

deaf community, as well as the lack of representation as delegates of the NAD" (Ibid). These concerns were issued to the NAD convention in the form of a statement read by social worker and caucus member Sandi LaRue. In the statement, the caucus told the NAD members "that NAD must communicate better with the black deaf community and encourage minorities involvement in the nation and state organizations" (Teeter 1980). Not receiving the desired response from the NAD, a third group was formed, again in D.C., to begin planning "a mini-conference by, for, and about [the] black deaf experience" (NBDA).

This group successfully planned the first Black Deaf conference, entitled "Black Deaf Experience", which was held the following year in Washington, D.C. In the conference program, the Black Deaf advocates describe themselves as "composed of a group of community organizations who have come together for the primary purpose of improving and enhancing the life and welfare of the deaf in the black community" (Black Deaf Advocates 1980). The purpose of the conference was to examine "the social, economical, educational, religious, political, and health trends of today and their impact on the lives of Black Deaf people" (Ibid.). Conference workshops dealt with issues of education, family, social services, health and mental health, employment, and interpreting. Inspired by the success of this first regional conference, Black Deaf Advocates planned another, larger conference in Cleveland, OH in 1982. This was the first National Conference, entitled "Black Deaf Strength Through Awareness", and was where the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) was officially named and formed. The aims of the NBDA, according to their bylaws created in 1983, were as follows:

> To better inform ourselves and the community about the rights and responsibilities of the Black Deaf citizens. To identify, examine, and disseminate information related to the impact of social, economic, educational, health, political, and religious issues through the medium of panels, lectures, and workshops (National Black Deaf Advocates).

The goal, then, was to improve the lives of Black deaf people through education both inside and outside the community. To reach Black deaf people at the local level, the national organization began sponsoring local city/state chapters and regional conferences. Although the NBDA does not provide an estimate for how many members they currently have, they have 36 local chapters divided into 5 different regions.[6]

The people of this organization called themselves "Advocates" to signal their focus on challenging "the disappointing reality of betterment" (NBDA). This disappointing reality referred to the ramifications of the gains made during the Civil Rights movements (integration of schools). Hairston and Smith (1983) echo this feeling of disappointment: "[w]hen schools became integrated or desegregated, few if any provisions were made for the disadvantaged backgrounds and special needs of Black deaf children" (16). Thus, the goals of the NBDA were "to inform ourselves and our community ... to work for changes that would uplift, support and improve the quality of life for the average Black Deaf person" (Crook 2007). Cohen (1985) argues that "when the structural bases of the boundary [of a community] are dismantled or become anachronistic…they are replaced by cultural bases expressed symbolically. If they are not thus replaced, the community disintegrates as a distinctive entity" (Cohen 1985, 81). I understand Cohen's 'structural' to 'symbolic' argument to mean a move from external forces to internal motivations. More specifically, enforced racial segregation, the basis on which the Black Deaf community was formed, had ended (however slowly), but the promises of the Civil Rights movement were not fully realized. The result of these unfulfilled promises was a legacy of uncertainty, which motivated Black deaf people to construct their own "system of values, norms,

[6] Several other national Deaf organizations with minority interests were founded after the NBDA. For example, Deaf Women United was founded in 1985 and the National Asian Deaf Congress was founded in 1992.

and moral codes", and with it their own cultural institutions, to address the unique plight of Black deaf people (9). Thus, the Black Deaf community adapted through the creation of a national organization and local city/state chapters.

The Role of Language

During a workshop I attended at the Midwestern Regional Black Deaf Advocates conference, the presenter, who was lecturing on the history of the Black Deaf community, turned to the topic of language. After explaining some of the research about Black ASL, the presenter played a short clip that showed examples of "Black signs" from McCaskill et al.'s (2011) research. At the end of the short video, the presenter explained how Black ASL incorporated words or phrases from African-American English (AAE) into ASL and provided an additional example that was not shown in the short video. However, a Black deaf man in attendance began to comment and expressed confusion at some of the signs that were shown – he had never seen them – and the signs he was familiar with he described as "old" signs that were no longer used. The presenter agreed that some of the signs could be considered old, but some of these signs were just from the South. This interaction inspired me to think about what Black ASL looks like today, in different regions, and why it has changed. In his introduction to *Introducing Raciolinguistics: Racing Language and Languaging Race in Hyperracial Times*, H. Samy Alim (2016) writes: "As we come into a new understanding that language varieties are not just lists of features that belong to a given 'race,'…we can move toward speaking in terms of the more fluid sense of 'linguistic resources'" (2). Racial and ethnic identities are not fixed, but are created and recreated through the "continuous and repeated" use of language (5). This seems to be true even for a language as young as American Sign Language. In this section, I provide a summary of influential literature written about Black ASL. I argue that the linguistic changes occurring in

Black ASL is the result of the racialization of Black deaf people as simultaneously *Black* and *Deaf,* which is another example of the reassertion and reaffirmation of the Black Deaf communities' boundaries in response to social change.

Previous Studies on Black Deaf Communities and Black ASL

Studies on the Black Deaf community can be categorized into three broad categories: Black Deaf community and culture, Black d/Deaf signing, and strategies for improving education or vocational opportunities for Black deaf people. I will be summarizing the first two categories. Instead of presenting an exhaustive list of the literature, I will limit my review to the handful of studies that have had the most impact on the field of Black Deaf studies. Before delving deeper, however, let me provide a brief overview of the sociolinguistic terminology I will be using. Signs in American Sign Language have five basic parts: "handshape, movement, location, palm orientation, and non-manual signals…a change in one part may create a difference in meaning"(Lucas, Bayley, and Valli 2003, 12). The topics of the studies mentioned below are on sociolinguistic variation at the phonological, lexical, syntactic, and discourse level.

For sign languages, phonological variation refers to the variation that affects the five basic parts of signs, which can be "changed, added, removed, or rearranged" (17). For instance, the handshapes for signs such as FUNNY or BORED can be produced with or without the thumb extended (see Figure 1); the sign KNOW can be produced at the location of the forehead or the cheek (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2); the palm orientation for the sign WEEK may be signed with the palm facing down or up (see Figure 3); and the sign YEAR can be made with a full rotation of the dominant hand around the non-dominant hand or with a small circular movement above the non-dominant hand (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). One important difference between spoken language and sign language phonology concerns the type of articulators: spoken languages use the vocal

apparatus while sign languages use the hands plus the body, the face, and gaze, just to name a few grammatically important articulators. Thus, signs can also vary in use of one or two hands to produce signs.

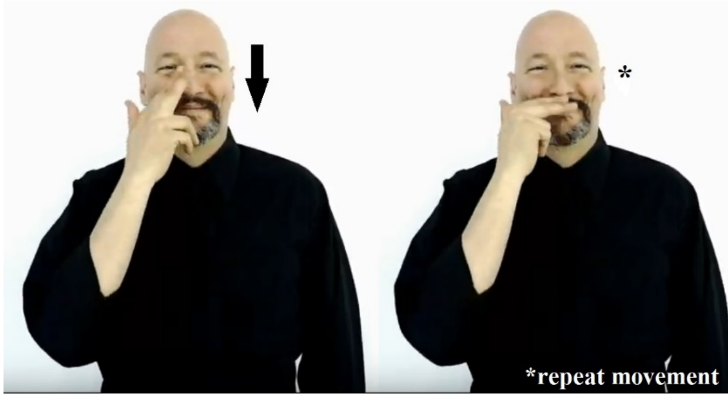

Figure 1. FUNNY **with thumb extended. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

Figure 2a. KNOW**, non-lowered variant. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

Figure 2b. KNOW**, lowered variant. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

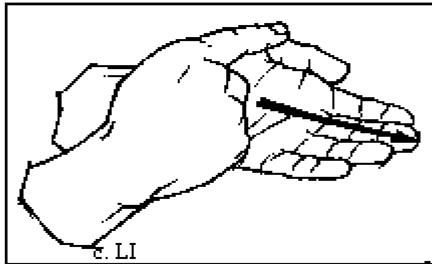

Figure 3. WEEK**, palm orientation down variant. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

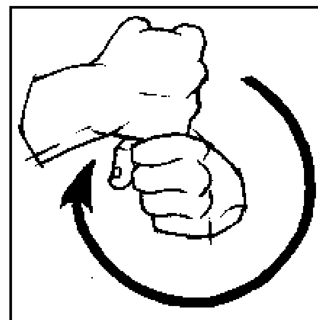

Figure 4a. YEAR**, full rotation variant. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

Figure 4b. YEAR**, small circular movement variant. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

Lexical variation is the “variation in word-sized units” (Lucas, Bayley, and Valli 2003, 19). Sociolinguistic research of sign languages has mainly focused on two kinds of lexical variation. The first type are separate variants, which means the parameters of the sign are entirely different from one another. The different signs for BIRTHDAY (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) are a good example of separate variants. Phonologically related variants, on the other hand, only differ in one or two parameters (e.g. handshape or movement). For example, the variation in the signs for BANANA (see Figure 6.1) only differ in the handshape of the dominant (moving) hand (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 5a. BIRTHDAY**, Variant 1. (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

Figure 5b. BIRTHDAY**, Variant 2 - BIRTH + DAY (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

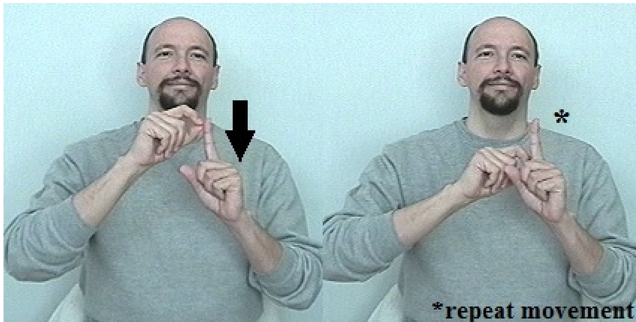

Figure 6a. BANANA**, Variant 1 (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)**

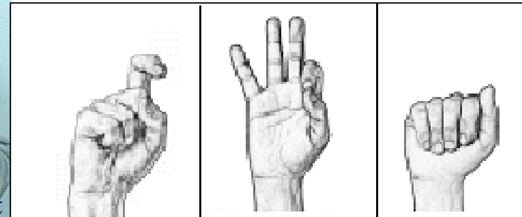

Figure 6b. The dominant hand can be any of these handshapes, just to name a few: X (left), F (middle), A (right) (Images courtesy of Dr. Bill Vicars and www.lifeprint.com.)

Variation in the construction and structure of sentences is known as syntactic variation. One example of syntactic variation in ASL is the use of pronouns: American Sign Language is a pronoun-dropping (pro-drop) language. In a pro-drop language "the verb in a sentence may be accompanied by a pronoun, but the pronoun may also be left out" (Lucas, Bayley, and Valli 2003, 19). For example, in Spanish, another pro-drop language, the sentence *Yo me llamo Sofia* (My name is Sofia) does not require the pronoun – *Me llamo Sofia* – because it can be deduced from the conjugation of the verb. The process is similar in ASL. For instance, the sentence for "I

think" can be signed as PRO.1 THINK or just as THINK.[7] In the THINK example, the pronoun is optional because it can be deduced by the context of the conversation.

Finally, variation in discourse is variation above the sentence. Discourse variation concerns how words and sentences are put together in conversations. One example of discourse variation in ASL is the variety in the use of constructed action/dialogue. Constructed action and constructed dialogue, sometimes referred to as role-shifting, is when signers "'use their body, head and eye gaze to report the actions, thoughts, words and expressions of characters within a discourse'" (Metzger 1995, 256 [in McCaskill et al., 118]). Instances of constructed action/dialogue may involve directional shifting of the signer's torso to indicate when the signers' words are her own or reported speech or eye gaze shifting up or down to indicate the characters height or status, to name a few common features. Nancy Frishberg (1975), in her study on historical change in ASL, argues that some linguistic variation is an example of an ongoing process of historical change. More specifically, she identified changes related to symmetry, displacement, assimilation and fluidity, lexical content that is limited to the hands, and morphological preservations.[8]

Since the mid-1960s, when serious social and linguistic research into American Sign Language (ASL) began in the U.S., race was noted as a factor affecting variation within ASL,

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[7] PRO.1 is shorthand for "I", the first-person pronoun.

[8] Symmetry: Frishberg argues that two-handed signs, or one-handed signs that can be signed two-handed, show an increasing trend toward symmetry in handshape and/or movement. Displacement: Frishberg argued that "[f]or signs made in contact with the face… two-handed signs become one-handed…[and] the specific location on the face changes historically from the center to the perimeter" (703). Additionally, "[f]or signs made below the neck…one-handed signs become two-handed…[and] the location becomes more centralized about the line of bilateral symmetry and moves up toward the hollow of the throat" (ibid). Assimilation and Fluidity: Frishberg writes that the "tendency here is toward smoothing of movement or transitions between parts of compound signs, while assimilating hand-shape and/or orientation" (707). Lexical: Frishberg argues that ASL is moving away from iconic gestures and is in the "process of limiting articulation in true signs to that which is made with the hands" (711). Morphology: Frishberg argues that some changes in ASL are the result of conformity to morphologically establish shapes or morphological meaningful group locations.

mostly in the South. However, the signing of Black deaf southerners was not given serious or extensive attention until a decade later. In the 1970s, James C. Woodward and his colleagues found lexical and phonological differences between the signing of Black deaf and white deaf southerners. In one study, based on data from 75 deaf signers from New Orleans, Louisiana and Atlanta, Georgia, 35 of whom were Black, Woodward (1976) found lexical variation that was both historical and synchronic.[9] Additionally, he found that variables such as region, age, and race influenced both face-to-hand and handedness variation.[10] More specifically, Black southern signers did not favor signs produced on the face over signs produce on the hand, but were "about equally divided" and younger Black signers and older White signers more often produced the two-handed variants of signs than other age groups (Woodward 1976, 215-216).

Anthony J. Aramburo (1989) and John Lewis et al. (1995) investigate the influence of conversational partner and topic, respectively, on the code-switching of Black deaf signers. Aramburo's study is composed of two parts. Based on the results of a survey of 60 Black deaf individuals living in Washington, D.C, the first part of his study mainly focuses on questions about community alignment and experiences of oppression. Aramburo (1989) argued that communication was identified as the largest barrier separating the Black Deaf community from both the Hearing Black and white Deaf communities. The Hearing Black community did not know or use ASL and the white Deaf community could not always comprehend the signing of Black deaf people. In the second part of his study, Aramburo investigates how the social identity of the conversational partner influences the way Black deaf people linguistically navigated

[9] Historical refers to older signs that were once used by most deaf people in the region but were now only being used by a subset of deaf people. Synchronic refers to unique signs that evolved independent of other signing dialects.

[10] Face-to-hand variation is when "certain signs that are produced on the face in some regions are produced on the hands in other regions", such as RABBIT or PEACH (Lucas et al. 2001, 139). Handedness variation concerns signs that can be signed with either 2 hands or 1 hand without completely altering the meaning, such as DON'T-KNOW.

conversations. His analysis was based on signing from seven dyads composed of 5 signers.[11] The five signers included two Black deaf men (labeled x and y) and one white deaf man who were native users of ASL (meaning they were exposed to ASL at an early age and use it as their primary language) along with one Black hearing man and one white hearing man who were both working in the local deaf community and knew some sign language.[12] Aramburo found that the signing in dyad 3, between the two Black deaf men, differed greatly from the signing in all other dyads. When the Black deaf men were conversing with the hearing participants (dyads 1, 2, 4, and 5) the signing was "ASL-like", which means that they incorporated more English into their signing (i.e. increase use of initialization of ASL signs or fingerspelling preposition, articles, or BE verbs that are typically omitted from ASL grammar). In dyads 6 and 7, between the Black deaf men and the white hearing man, the conversations had little to no English features and followed ASL structure more closely. However, Aramburo explains:

> [I]n dyad 3, the two black deaf participants, X and Y use signs when paired together that they do not use when paired separately with the white deaf participant in dyads 6 and 7… The facial expressions are exaggerated in dyad 3, and both participants use their signing space to the fullest. In contrast, these two black deaf participants, X in dyad 6 and Y in dyad 7, use less exaggerated facial expressions, fewer body movements, and a smaller signing space when conversing with the white deaf participant than when conversing with each other (115-118).[13]

Aramburo does not explain how he measures the more dramatic use of non-manual signals and larger signing spaces beyond mere observation, however, he argues that these observations are

[11] The seven conversational dyads were as follows: 1) Black deaf man (x) with Black hearing man, 2) Black deaf man (y) with Black hearing man, 3) Black deaf man (x) with Black deaf man (y), 4) Black deaf man (x) with white hearing man, 5) Black deaf man (y) with white hearing man, 6) Black deaf man (x) with white deaf man, and 7) Black deaf man (y) with white deaf man.

[12] Aramburo (1989) does not specify their ASL skill level.

[13] Facial expression, also known as non-manual signals, that are "exaggerated" indicates that they are larger, bigger, or more intense (e.g. eyebrows raised to the full extent of their height). The typical signing space "is a rectangle that covers the area from the top of the head to the waist, from shoulder to shoulder, and a foot in front of the signers", thus, signing outside of this standard space is considered larger (McCaskill et al. 2011, 59).

evidence of instances of code-switching based on the social identity of the conversational partner. Aramburo's study inspired other researchers to delve deeper into these "Black signs" and the different influences on code-switching behavior.

John Lewis et al. (1995), continuing in a similar line of research as Aramburo, investigates how conversation topic influences the code-switching of Black deaf signers. Based on interview data from a 1990 documentary entitled "Deaf Mosaic", Lewis et al. analyzes the signing of two Black deaf interviewees, who were interviewed by a white deaf man for the documentary. The two participants were an "African American, Deaf female from Illinois" and an "African American, hard of hearing male" from Philadelphia, PA (19). Both interviewees were from hearing families and attended Gallaudet University, however, the woman attended residential schools whereas the man attended mainstream schools and learned ASL at Gallaudet. Whereas Aramburo (1989) argues that the social identity of the conversation partner can influence how Black deaf participants sign, this study argues that topic can also influence signing and interacts in complex ways with the constraint of conversation partner. Lewis et al. found that the interviewees "code-switched" to a more "African American variety of ASL" when discussing the other Black cast members, their own identity, and their choice to wear African-style clothing (20-24). According to the researchers, some of the features that signaled a code-switch were increased body movement/body shift and exaggerated facial expressions. Following J.J. Gumperz and J. Cook-Gumperz's (1981), the authors conclude that interviewees were making a linguistic choice by "incorporating the body movements and expressions used [to a greater degree] within the African American Deaf community" because they desired "to be associated with the values of a specific speech community" (Lewis, Palmer, and Williams 1995, 24). In this case, the Black Deaf community. Lewis et al. writes: "[a]lthough the documentation

and research of variation in the signs of African American community is relatively small, there does seem to be a consistency in the characteristics identified" (25). However, he does not go into any further details about these "characteristics". Since the 1970s, sign linguists have strived to identify what features signal a Black way of signing.

Various sign linguists, typically as part of larger sociolinguistic ASL research projects, have argued that Black deaf signing differs from white deaf signing phonologically, syntactically, at the level of discourse, and lexically. Woodward and De Santis (1977), Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001), and Lucas et al. (2007) argue that Black deaf signers produce more two-handed variants of signs. More specifically, as I will discuss in the next few paragraphs, McCaskill et al (2011) argues that the deletion of one hand is most common in Type 1 two-handed signs. Handshapes and movement are identical in Type 1 two-handed signs. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 are examples of the two-handed variants for DON'T-KNOW and DON'T-LIKE, respectively, which are both Type 1 two-handed signs. Woodward, Erting, and Oliver (1976) claim that, for signs with variants that can either be produced on the location of the hands or the face, Black deaf signers used fewer face variants than white deaf signers in the same study. The sign for RABBIT, which is one of the examples in Woodward, Erting, and Oliver's study, still currently exhibits variation between the face (see figure 8.1) and hands (see Figure 8.2).

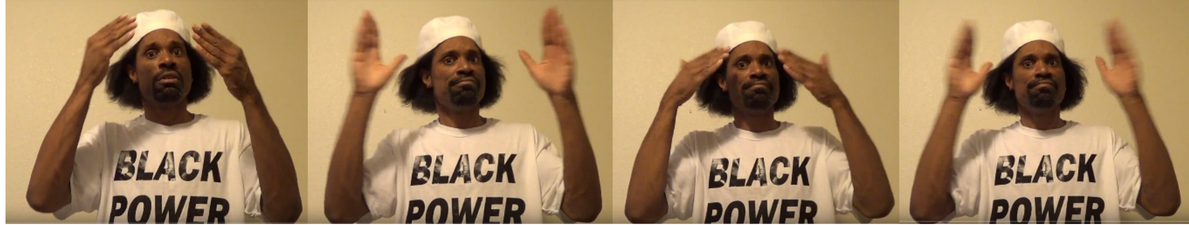

Figure 7a. DON'T-KNOW**, Two-handed variant. (Images courtesy of KenX50, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy50ExhN2YQv5xZEvPfoAhA)**

Figure 7b. DON'T-LIKE**, Two-handed variant. (Images courtesy of KenX50, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy50ExhN2YQv5xZEvPfoAhA)**

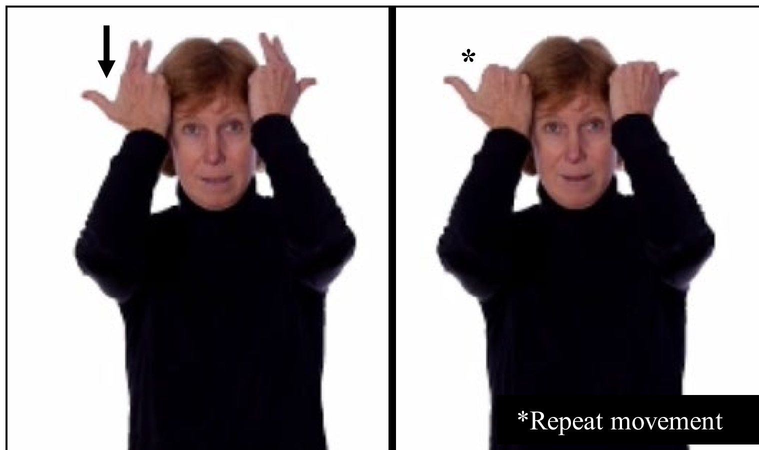

Figure 8a. RABBIT**, Face variant. (Images courtesy of Signing Savvy, www.signingsavvy.com)**

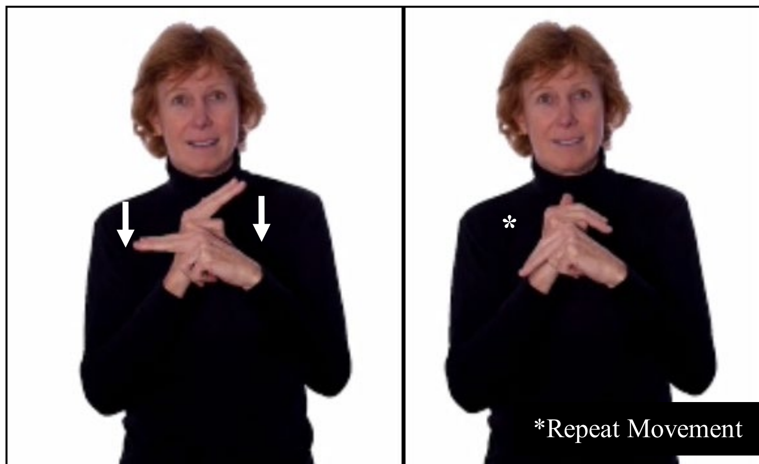

Figure 8b. RABBIT**, Hand variant. (Images courtesy of Signing Savvy, www.signingsavvy.com)**

According to Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001), Black deaf signers favor non-lowered citation forms of signs (see Figure 9), have greater clausal and phrasal repetition, and mouth English words less often than their white deaf counterparts. Aramburo (1989), Lewis, Palmer, and Williams (1995), and Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001) found that Black deaf signers have larger signing spaces, meaning their signs are often produced outside the typical signing space (see Figure 10). Black deaf signers, according to Metzger and Mather (2004), also use constructed dialogue and constructed action more often. Finally, lexical variation between white and Black deaf signers has been noted by Woodward (1976), Aramburo (1989), and Lucas, Bayley, and Valli (2001), just to name a few.

Figure 9. KNOW in citation form, non-lowered. (Images courtesy of KenX50, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy50ExhN2YQv5xZEvPfoAhA)

Figure 10. **DOESN'T-MATTER. The black box represents the typical signing space: top of the signer's head to their waist, from shoulder to shoulder. Note how his sign extends far outside this space. (Images courtesy of KenX50, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy50ExhN2YQv5xZEvPfoAhA)**

Inspired by anecdotal evidence and building upon the previously mentioned research on Black ASL, Carolyn McCaskill, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Joseph Hill (2011) investigate and describe the history and structure of Black southern signing in *The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL*. This book was the result of a 4 year long empirical study and was the first of its kind in size, topic, and depth. The authors analyzed signing data from 96 Black deaf southern signers.[14] The participants were separated into two age groups: 55 years and older and 35 years and younger, which represented the eras of racially segregated Deaf schools and desegregated Deaf schools. The authors begin with a description of the sociohistorical reality that led to the formation of Black ASL.

[14] The signers were from Raleigh, North Carolina; Little Rock, Arkansas; Houston, Texas; Talladega, Alabama; Hampton, Virginia; and New Orleans, Louisiana.

The remainder of the book is dedicated to analyzing and describing the structure of Black ASL. McCaskill et al. focus on eight areas of variation: 2-handed vs. 1-handed (handedness variation), forehead location vs. lowered, size of signing space, incorporation of African American English (AAE) into signing, use of repetition, use of role shifting (constructed action/dialogue), amount of mouthing, and lexical differences. The authors found that variation was linked to both race and age. Black deaf southern signers, in comparison to their white deaf counterparts, "use more two-handed variants", use more non-lowered variants" (see figures 2.1 and 2.2), "use a larger signing space", "make greater use of repetition", "appear to use more constructed action and constructed dialogue; however, the data shows a great deal of individual variation", "appear to mouth less", "incorporate AAE lexical items into their signing",[15] and have "lexical variation" (McCaskill et al. 2011, 162-163). However, the authors note that Black southern signing has been changing. The data from younger signers (35 years and younger) demonstrates this change: younger Black signers use fewer two-handed variants and fewer nonlowered variants than older Black signers; younger Black signers' signing space is similar in size to younger white signers; younger Black signers "incorporate more AAE lexical items than their elders"; and "younger Black signers use fewer "Black" variants than their elders" (ibid). McCaskill et al. conclude: "we have not identified unique features of Black ASL other than the incorporation of AAE and lexical items…Thus far, then, the differences between Black ASL and White ASL are quantitative rather than qualitative", which, some would argue, is characteristic of sociolinguistic variation in general (165).

[15] The incorporation of African-American English (AAE) lexical features into American Sign Language refers to the signers borrowing words or phrases common in AAE. One such example that McCaskill et al. found was the phrase STOP TRIPPING. Participants produced the sign for TRIP with the same handshape and movement as the citation form but, instead of being produced in neutral space, the signs was "produced at the forehead to indicate the cognitive component of the meaning (i.e. 'stop imaging things')" (McCaskill et al. 2011, 133).

McCaskill et al. posit technological advances and "integration and mainstreaming" as the reasons for the changes seen in the signing of the younger age group (McCaskill et al. 2011, 164). Due to advances in technology, the younger generation of deaf signer have more exposure to AAE through various forms of media. One of the earliest advances in media technology that benefitted deaf people was closed captioning. In 1958, the United States Office of Education started the Captioned Films for the Deaf program (Public Law 85-905) to "provide subtitled Hollywood films for deaf people" (Norwood 1988). Educators quickly realized the potential usefulness of captioned visual media and the original law was amended several times to make this technology more easily accessible and widely available. It was not until 1978 that captioned television became widely available in the homes of deaf people (Padden 2007).

McCaskill et al. argue that integration resulted in Black ASL, a once highly distinct signing variety of Black deaf southerners, to become linguistically closer to "standard" ASL in younger generations. Between the mid-1950s and 1970s, schools and departments previously used to educate Black deaf youth were closed and the children were transferred to the neighboring formerly whites only Deaf schools. For many, these integrated schools would be the first time they were in classes with white deaf children or instructed by white teachers. The Black deaf children experienced confusion at the signing of their new peers and teachers and had to learn "entirely new signs" (Sellers 2012). McCaskill et al. are not the first to assert this point. Woodward (1976) observed that Black deaf southerners tended to use "more White signs after leaving residential school" (Woodward 1976, 217). Hairston and Smith (1983) write that as "Black schools for the deaf merged with predominantly white schools, Black children began to sign 'white,' or as some others would say, 'the Gallaudet way'" (Hairston and Smith 1983, 56).

There have been several reasons given to explain why Black deaf people adopted signing "the Gallaudet way" after integration and, generally, the reasons are different depending on the age of the signers. Robert Bayley, Joseph C. Hill, Carolyn McCaskill, and Ceil Lucas (2017) found that older signers tended to hold more negative views of Black ASL, but that younger signers' views were more positive. For example, older signers viewed the Black way of signing as incorrect and the 'white' signs as better or more advanced and needed to get ahead. One Black deaf woman, after Woodward asked her when she learned to sign, responded:

> [t]hat her interpreter just taught her. Being surprised by her fluency, I asked if she hadn't attended a residential school. She said yes. I then continued with, 'You mean you didn't use signs at the residential school?' She answered, 'Yes, but now I'm learning correct signs' (Woodward 1976, 217).

Bayley et al. (2017) remark that "[m]ost older signers said that white signing was better because it differed in vocabulary and complexity. One Louisianan signer said that white signing was better because 'it was difficult to understand'…Many other older signers shared this perception" (26). In contrast, younger signers code-switch to 'white' signs depending on the situation or audience and were more aware of the diversity in signing styles (Bayley et al. 2017).

Lastly, the increase trend in mainstreaming deaf students in recent decades has also contributed to the language change observed by McCaskill et al. The researchers write, "Black Deaf signers of course have extended contact with speakers of AAE and also with the aspects of popular culture in which AAE features occur" (McCaskill et al. 2011, 126). This extended contact is, in part, due to the increase in mainstreaming of Black deaf students. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was passed. The purpose of this law was to "guaranteed a free, appropriate public education to each child with a disability in every state and locality across the country" (U.S. Department of Education). This law led to an increase in the number of deaf students enrolled in mainstream schools with hearing students.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990, "expanded the rights of Deaf people to access services such as interpreting" and strengthened the trend toward mainstreaming deaf students rather than sending them to residential Deaf schools (Humphries and Humphries 2011). Attending non-residential schools allowed Black deaf students more time at home with their hearing family/community, granted them greater exposure to their Black hearing peers, and, thus, allowed them greater contact with African American English (AAE). In the final section, I address why the signing of younger Black deaf people more closely resembles the signing of their white deaf counterparts, except for the incorporation of AAE.

Linguistic Resources

In this final section, I illustrate how the signing of the younger generation of Black deaf southerners is influenced by Hearing Black *and* White Deaf racialization. Harking back to the introduction of this thesis, the dual process of Hearing Black and White Deaf racialization that Black deaf southern signers experience supports Dr. Anderson's assertion that the Black Deaf community in the U.S. are people who live in a "hearing and color-conscious society" (Anderson 1972 [quoted in Aramburo 1989, 103]). Alim (2016) defines racialization "as a process of socialization in and through language, as a continuous project of becoming as opposed to being" a racial or ethnic identity (2). As previously mentioned, McCaskill et al. (2011) found that the signing of Black deaf southerners more closely resembles the signing of their white deaf counterparts except when it comes to lexical variation. In fact, younger Black signers borrow more AAE words and phrases than the older Black deaf people. Using a 'white' way of signing is not simply about fitting in with their peers but is part of a larger process of becoming *Deaf*. Beginning in the 1960s, cultural studies on North American Deaf people have been mainly concerned with proving and illustrating that Deaf culture exists and that ASL is a true language.

However, this culture, and "standard" ASL, have been "based predominantly on White Deaf signers" with emphasis on white Deaf signers from Deaf families (Fernandes and Myers 2009, 21). Normative Deaf culture and ASL has come to be synonymous with *white*. Therefore, there is an expectation among the "core White Deaf community" that all deaf people should conform to their standard (19). This expectation of conformity has been so ingrained that the cultures of other deaf people are labelled as "deviations from the norm of Deaf culture, as non-Deaf, or even as unhealthy manifestations of deaf people with unrealized Deafhood" (Ibid.). Some young Black deaf signers are aware of these differences in signing, choosing to code-switch depending on the time, place, or person. Thus, I hypothesize, that Black deaf signers who sign more 'white' are using the linguistic features associated with "standard" ASL to conform to the established regime of *Deafness*.

The incorporation of AAE into the signing of young Black deaf signers at a higher rate than their forebearers is the second process of racialization: becoming *Black*. Loanwords or calques from AAE may derive from the signer's socialization in their family/community and/or from their exposure to AAE in media. Using AAE lexical items can be a tool to signal in-group status. For example, Alim (2016) argues that former President Barack Obama's use of "Black Language" is a "conscious raciolinguistics project" to translate himself as "Black" (2). Another example is from Jewish British signers whose signing is being influenced by Israeli Sign Language: "[m]any Jewish deaf people visit Israel and they are increasingly adopting Israeli signs" (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999, 28). Similarly, some young Black deaf signers consciously utilize AAE to align with "'already pronounced regimes of Blackness'" and to present themselves as Black (Ibrahim 2003, 154 [in Alim 2016, 2]). While seemingly contradictory, the signing of Black deaf southern youth conforms to standard white ASL in most

linguistic aspects, to present themselves as Deaf. The critical exception is lexical variation in which AAE lexical items are utilized by Black deaf southern youth to conform to the standards of Blackness. This dual racialization as *Black* and *Deaf* is an example of the unique pressures faced by Black Deaf signers in North America suggesting that, in response to changing technology and school policies, younger Black deaf signers are using their linguistic resources to redefine Black Deaf community boundaries.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have shown how the Black Deaf community in the U.S. consolidated during an era of racial segregation and constantly redrew community boundaries to weather the gains and frustrations of the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights eras. Additionally, as a result of racially integrated schools, an increase in the mainstreaming trend, and technological advances in media, Black deaf signers have more contact with both their white deaf and hearing Black peers. Thus, I argue that Black deaf signers face an increasing pressure to adhere to established ideas of Blackness and Deafness. These pressures are reflected in the language change observed in signing Black deaf southern youth, as described by McCaskill et al. (2011).

To provide a more nuanced understanding of the Black Deaf community, Anthony J. Aramburo (1989) writes, "[t]o be sure, a person who is black and deaf is not automatically a member of the black deaf community. Black individuals who become deaf late in life are examples of this. They have not yet experienced the deafness aspect in the combination of what it means to be black *and* deaf" (112). With Aramburo's statement in mind, I explored the sociohistorical aspects of how the Black Deaf community arose, was maintained, and how American Sign Language was used in the process of racialization of Black deaf youth to illustrates that the Black Deaf community (and identifying as Black Deaf) is a "continuous

project of becoming as opposed to being" (Alim 2016, 2). By predominantly utilizing the cultural products (literature, media, and conference materials) of Black deaf people, I have attempted to provide a sociohistorical analysis of Black Deaf communities that centers Black Deaf epistemologies. This thesis contributes to the broader literature on race/ethnicity and sociolinguistic studies by situating Black Deaf communities into a broader historical context. Additionally, I have extended the racialization literature to include Deaf populations and sign language.

It is important to note however that this thesis was mainly based on text and media data. An in-depth ethnographic research project focusing on the sociohistorical reality and signing of the Black Deaf community in different regions of the U.S., besides the South, would be required to confirm the arguments presented in this study. In looking forward, I hope to continue an investigation into the signing of Black deaf people outside of the Southern U.S. One potential topic of study would be in-depth analysis of the intentional code/style-switching amongst Black deaf signers to better understand who has the linguistic means to code/style-switch, when, and why. Other questions for future research are as follows: is the Black ASL enumerated in McCaskill et al.'s work unique to the South? What is the process by which this dialect of Black ASL may have spread? How do dialectal and racial differences affect the social and linguistic interactions between Black signers and their ASL-English interpreters?

This thesis, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. Wright, Alicia. The thesis author was the primary investigator and author of this material.

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