Readings for this week

1. James Baldwin: “If Black English isn’t a language, then, tell me, what is?”
   New York Times, 1979

2. Salikoko Mufwene: “Race, racialism and the study of language evolution in America” in Language Evolution: Contact, Competition and Change (Longon: Continuum Press, 2008), pp. 92-112


4. Peter Roberts: “Creole English”, Ch. 3 of West Indians and their Language, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-87
Roadmap

*Nick*
1. Black Language as Exceptional

2. Equality or Difference

*Jose*
3. Language and Identity in the US: Group Signaling and Power Dynamics

4. Identity emerging out of necessity

5. Responding to linguistic judgement and a marginalized existence
Mufwene: “Why then have linguists subscribed to hypotheses that common sense should have advised them to question seriously ...? Or, despite our rejections of the baby-talk hypothesis, have we kept a legacy of the nineteenth century in assuming that some races must have their own peculiar ways of appropriating languages of the dominant populations?”

Alim & Smitherman: “The combination of these two discourses - Black deficiency and racial assimilation and integration - suggests that in order for a Black person to make it in America, [they] must be an exception to the racist rule of Black deficiency and must prove it by not speaking like “those other Black people.””
Baldwin: “This was not merely, as in the European example, the adoption of a foreign tongue, but an alchemy that transformed ancient elements into a new language.”
Valuing Blackness: Equality, or Difference?

Baldwin: “A language comes into existence by means of brutal necessity, and the rules of the language are dictated by what the language must convey.”

Nancy Fraser: “The pluralist version of multiculturalism is premised on a one-sided understanding of difference: difference is viewed as intrinsically positive and inherently cultural. This perspective accordingly celebrates difference uncritically while failing to interrogate its relation to inequality.”
“He’s probably one of those Africans who doesn’t like us, but who will use the label ‘African American’ to take advantage of affirmative action programs.” (Alim and Smitherman 22)
Connecting Baldwin and Mufwene
(Race emerging out necessity)
“It may very well be that both the child, and his elder, have concluded that they have nothing whatever to learn from the people of a country that has managed to learn so little.” (Baldwin 1979)
An Empirical Analysis of ‘Acting White’*

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2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address by Senator Barack Obama
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Spectral popularity and grades by race, private schools figure removed due to copyright restrictions.
1. The history of Black English varieties, as well as the history of many “creole” languages, is intertwined with histories of oppression. Does that history complicate our relationship to those cultural forms? How, if at all, should we recognize that history in the present?

2. To what degree should instructors of English, for native speakers, stay in concepts of grammar? Knowing that otherwise, in the world we live in, a child will have less opportunities.