

ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS

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of ALASKA
ANCHORAGE

ENGL A476:
ENGLISH IN ALASKA
ARTIFACT ANALYSIS
FALL 2020

FIRST ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

- Alaska Black Caucus
- First Annual Awards Banquet program
- Anchorage, Alaska: Ramada Inn
- January 29, 1977
- Seeks to break down barriers hindering economic, political, educational, cultural, and racial progress and achievement on behalf of African Americans

ARTIFACT

Alaska
Black
Caucus
P.O. Box 3342
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

First Annual Awards Banquet

*Ramada Inn
Anchorage, Alaska*

January 29, 1977

ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS (1977)

This particular artifact portrays the evident hope African Americans were hanging onto during the 1970s in Alaska specifically, while also pointing to the evident suffering within the local Black communities and its extend nationwide, calling upon a need to protect Black freedoms that have been won. The artifact illustrates the powerful African-American Vernacular English narrative structure, breaking the stereotypical negative concord.

In order to fully appreciate the Alaskan variety of English in relation to the overall history of the English language, the artifact is looked at through three different lenses: the specific historical context of African Americans in Alaska, the broad historical context of the struggle for Black freedoms in the United States around 1977, and finally, the linguistic trajectory of the use of African American Vernacular English.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ALASKA

According to Hartman and Reamer,

- The presence of African Americans in Alaska began in the mid-nineteenth century and extends to present day (31).
- During the postwar decades, African Americans in Alaska experienced both racism and opportunity (30).
- There were macro-level policies, such as housing discrimination, that shaped Anchorage's postwar racial landscape (37).

THE EASTCHESTER FLATS AS A RESULT OF MACRO-LEVEL POLICIES

According to Hartman and Reamer,

- Covenant language was tailored to limit the land to whites: “lots shall never be sold, rented to, or occupied by any person of negro descent” (37).
- By 1952, Blacks being denied access into neighborhoods resulted in three-quarters of the areas Black population living in the Flats (40).
- The Flats were known for prostitution, gambling, clubs, and shacks (40).
- Local banks denied loans to the Black population seeking to improve their property or to finance a business (46).
- There was a sense of community and efficiency, represented through the “real estate office, laundry, beauty parlor, make-shift hotels, cafes, barbershops, and Alaska’s only Black-owned and operated grocery store” (42).
- Eventually, Anchorage uprooted the Flats, the largest Black Community. By 1960, the Eastchester Flats no longer existed and “Black power was diluted, due to no longer being concentrated in one area” (47).

REAL EXPERIENCES FROM AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ALASKA

As told by Hartman and Reamer,

- Bernice Means, a Black woman, recalled a hostile environment during the 1940s in Alaska, claiming that Black men and women “couldn’t go in the bakery, they couldn’t go in no alleys, and they couldn’t go in the theatre” (35).
- The Campbell’s, a black family, was moving into a White-majority town. Unfortunately, their home was set to flames the night before they were expected to move into it (30).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ALASKA

According to Hartman and Reamer,

- There was promise for the Black men and women who made the journey, exemplified through work opportunities such as finding work with the railroad (30).
- There were opportunities available, regardless of race: soldiers, government workers, skilled tradespeople, and business people (32).
- 1939: Installation and development of Fort Richardson and the Elmendorf airstrip (35).

NATIONWIDE TRENDS: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ALASKA

According to Hartman and Reamer, “Anchorage’s postwar history connects to several nationwide trends” such as: urban renewal, mass migration, racial discrimination, community formation, urban planning, and civic activism (33).

I sought to adjoin the history of Blacks in Alaska to the bigger wartime postwar struggle and victories for Black freedoms in the United States, tying into a broader story about Black communities.

THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK FREEDOMS IN THE UNITED STATES AROUND 1977

- During the 1960's, there was a push for civil rights for African Americans (Hall 196).
- “The post–World War II push for civil rights in America started in the South, with African Americans, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” (Hall 203).
- 1964: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited employment discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin (Gates 388).
- 1965: Voting Rights Act led to the increased number of registered black voters and officeholders (Gates 389).
- Dr. King risked his own life, assassinated in 1968, to achieve and acquire civil rights and liberties for African Americans (Hall 203).
- After Dr. King was killed the civil rights movement struggled to recover and “the more militant Black Panther Party [was] foregoing nonviolence, risking the gains achieved—and suppressing hoped-for future successes—by decade’s end” (Hall 203).
- The economic decline and extreme poverty experienced by the Black community of the inner city was often portrayed in the television, sports, music, film, literature, and art industries such as the television series *The Jefferson's* that featured on CBS and the birth of hip-hop, a cultural phenomenon (Hall 206).

DISSIPATION AND VICTORY: THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK FREEDOMS

- America during the 1970s was a historical time filled with controversies. Amongst the various controversies, were those surrounding African Americans.
- By the 1970s, other groups began their own pushes and the push surrounding African Americans dissipated, with some emerging victories (Hall 196).
- Other groups that followed the example of Blacks in the south included: Latinos, women, Native Americans, and the LGBTQ community (Hall 203).
- 1966: “National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded, launching the second wave of feminism” (Hall 203). NOW included the promotion of black feminism (Gates 397).
- 1968: “American Indian Movement (AIM) raised awareness of the plight of Native Americans for the first time since the Plains Indian Wars of the nineteenth century” (Hall 203).
- 1972: Equal Employment Opportunity Act was created (Gates 388).
- 1976: Women were admitted to the Naval Academy for the first time (Gates 395).

SUPREME COURT CASES: THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK FREEDOMS

- 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruled that segregation and the tradition of “separate but equal” would not be permitted in public schools (Hall 205-206).
- 1971-72: “84 percent of Boston’s white students attended schools that were more than 80 percent white and 62 percent of black students attended schools with more than 70 percent black students” (Gates 393).
- 1971: As a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, with little to no change, in another Supreme Court case, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, the Court ruled that the busing of children from one district to another to more evenly desegregate public schools was constitutional (Hall 206).
- Ultimately, “the busing issue brought to light the real-world impact of income inequality between the races” (Hall 206).
- The fight for equality between the races demanded activism (Hall 203).

BLACK PREACHING: AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

- My artifact, the First Annual Awards Banquet program for the Alaska Black Caucus Event in 1977, has direct correlations to the linguistic practices utilized in Black preaching tradition. The black preaching tradition seeks to “earn the respect of the most demanding congregations” (Rickford & Rickford 40).
- For my artifact, the “congregation” the Alaska Black Caucus event sought to earn respect from were those who wanted to protect or hinder the “economic, political, educational, cultural, and racial progress and achievement on behalf of the Black population,” as stated on page 4 of the artifact.
- African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) = Black English Vernacular (BEV) or, simply, Black English (Sealey-Ruiz 37).

STANDARD ENGLISH & AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

- According to Rickford and Rickford, “Most African American preachers, however, use primarily Standard English in their sermons” (40). Throughout my artifact, there is the absence of the stereotypical negative Black English concord, such as the vernacular use of a-prefixing, different irregular forms, and intensified equative *be*, with the emphasis of the conventional use of Standard English instead, “Demonstrating control over Standard English and the pauses, inflections, cadences and other devices of the black rhetorical and preaching tradition” (46).
- “Most African Americans speak AAVE when expressing their deepest feelings and most hilarious moments. They use Standard American English (SAE) in settings such as work places and schools-spaces that represent and reinforce the values of the broader European-Americans society” (Sealey-Ruiz 37).
- MLK was a preacher himself and an American civil rights activist who utilized Standard English, predominantly exemplified in his sermon “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” from 1968 and “I Have a Dream” speech from 1963.

RHETORICAL APPEAL: AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

- Repetition of structure in the first two sentences:
 - “The Alaska Black Caucus *is...those freedoms...*”
 - “The Caucus *is...those barriers...*”
- Rhetorical balance, cadence, and parallel structure in the second sentence:
 - “..that still *hinder economic, political, educational, cultural and racial progress.*”
- Collective black experience in the fifth sentence:
 - “...*our* children...”
- Engaging and encouraging participation into the Black experience as part of a call-and-response ritual and strategy used by Black preachers in the sixth sentence (Rickford & Rickford 50):
 - ...invites *you*, personally...”
 - “You” is a personal deictic, concerned with the grammatical persons involved in an utterance.
- Biblical allusion in the third sentence:
 - “...looking for a ‘*Black Moses*’ to ‘lead us out of the wilderness.’”
 - Moses was a prophet who is attributed with leading the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea.
 - African America’s reifying impulse to coronate a Moses figure is centuries old (Gilbert 38).
 - MLK was considered the “Black Moses” of the twentieth century (Gilbert 39).

ARTIFACT

Purpose

The Alaska Black Caucus is an organization concerned with guarding those freedoms Black people have won. The Caucus is dedicated to eliminating those barriers to achievement that still hinder economic, political, educational, cultural and racial progress. We are not a "show" organization, nor a social group looking for a "Black Moses" to "lead us out of the wilderness". The time for those things has long since passed. We are people who are genuinely concerned with the quality of education for our children and with enhancing the economic and political status of all Black people.

The Caucus invites you, personally, to visit our meetings, assess first hand our goals and objectives and then give us your input and opinions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Through the conventional use of Standard English, vernacular becomes a powerful element through the diversity and a powerful Black English narrative structure emerges that is not just for “show,” but is rather constructed in an effort for individuals to gain “insight [and experience] into [the] souls of black folk” (Rickford & Rickford 41,55).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the University of Alaska Anchorage for allowing me to reproduce this program. Thank you to my family for providing a supportive environment that helped make this artifact analysis possible. And thank you to all the librarians at the Consortium Library who supported the research process.