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The Black Deaf Community's Fight Against White Language Supremacy: Intersectionality, Audism, and Linguistic Racism

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Abstract: Co-written by intersectional Deaf authors, this article examines how White Language Supremacy (WLS)-the privileging of white, standardized, and hearing-centric language norms—marginalizes Black Deaf languaging, particularly Black American Sign Language (BASL), and how Black Deaf communities resist. We address a persistent gap in scholarship that has long analyzed WLS in spoken language contexts but has not sufficiently examined how WLS intersects with audism and impacts signed languages. Data comprise co-authored first-person narratives and reflective accounts from five Deaf students of color, developed in a Writing Seminar research project and elaborated post-course with their multiracial Deaf professor. Guided by Black Deaf Feminism and critical qualitative traditions, we conducted an intersectional thematic analysis that included collaborative open coding, iterative development of higher-order themes, and integration with scholarship in raciolinguistics, composition, Deaf education, and BASL. Given our situated narratives-highlighting lived experiences of tokenization, linguistic policing, and systemic inequities across Deaf and mainstream schools-we offer analytic generalizations supported by thick description and triangulation across multiple narrators. Findings show that WLS operates through code-switching respectability pedagogies, standardization logics that privilege white ASL, and segregation legacies, while counterspaces and Black Deaf feminist praxis enable belonging and resistance. Our analysis positions BASL as a site of cultural resilience and resistance—calling for flexible intersectional solidarity to dismantle racial and audiocentric hierarchies. We conclude with actionable implications for recognition, policy, pedagogy, and assessment in U.S., Canadian, and international contexts.

Keywords: Black American Sign Language, Black Deaf community, Black Deaf Feminism, intersectionality, raciolinguistics, White language supremacy

White society has never truly respected Black people, let alone Black Deaf people–a reality documented by decades of research (Anderson & Dunn, 2023; Baker-Bell, 2020;

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Crenshaw, 2019; National Black Deaf Advocates, 1982; Rouse et al., 2023; Teeter, 1980; Wilder et al., 2017). Less widely known are the oppression of the Black Deaf community and their language, Black American Sign Language (BASL), rooted in White language supremacy (WLS). Intersecting oppressions—ableism, audism, racism, and language shaming-have also marginalized Canadian Black Sign Language (CBSL)- as research remains unpublished (Hussein, 2024; Jean-Baptiste, 2021; Rouse et al., 2023). These intersecting forces, particularly racism and language shaming, exemplify WLS' impact on Black Deaf communities in both Canada and the United States. Our intersectional analysis of racial and audiocentric (Eckert & Rowley, 2013) cultural hierarchies centers on Black Deaf American experiences while acknowledging WLS' global reach in Canada, Cuba, England, France, India, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, Tibet, Brazil, Peru—and other South American countries impacting Indigenous peoples in the Amazon; WLS also harms Indigenous peoples across the Americas, Asian Pacific Americans, Africans in France, Eastern European immigrants—including Jewish people, Moroccan immigrants in Spain, and more Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) through colonialism (Cushing & Clayton, 2024; Richardson et al., 2021; Roth-Gordon, 2023). Globally, racialized language discrimination stems from WLS.

Our study investigates how WLS affects the Black Deaf community in the United States, a research question that emerges from longstanding gaps in scholarship, policy, and educational practice. Although research in raciolinguistics, composition, and Deaf studies has documented how language ideologies uphold racial hierarchies and/or audiocentric norms (Baker-Bell, 2020; Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Mazique, 2023; Richardson et al., 2021; Roth-Gordon, 2023), the specific mechanism through which WLS marginalizes Black Deaf communities remains underexamined. Educational policies and institutions are central sites where language ideologies and attitudes that perpetuate racist and audist language hierarchies are reproduced, particularly through language standardization, code-switching pedagogies, and the historical segregation of Deaf schools (Baker-Bell, 2020; Cushing & Clayton, 2024; Hill, 2013; Hill & Tamene, 2022; Lucas et al., 2023; McCaskill et al., 2011). As Cushing and Clayton (2024) noted, language discrimination is not simply "individual, malicious acts of prejudice," but "a structural phenomenon underpinned by language ideologies which stratify, rank, and hierarchically organise language varieties and the communities associated with them [...] Schools are particularly key sites of language ideological production and the co-construction of racial, class, and linguistic stratification" (p. 2). School policies and practices shape classroom experiences—often limiting linguistic legitimacy and access to culturally sustaining education for Black Deaf students. By centering Black Deaf lived experiences within this broader policy and scholarly landscape, this article examines the intersecting forces of racism, audism, and linguistic shaming that marginalize BASL and shape Black Deaf students' educational trajectories. Through this analysis, we connect the research question—How does WLS affect the Black Deaf community? —to urgent implications for policy, scholarship, and linguistic justice in Deaf and hearing education.

Our analysis draws on co-authored first-person narratives and reflective accounts from five Deaf students of color, originating in a Writing Seminar research project with their multiracial Deaf writing professor, and developed through post-course collaboration. We synthesize our narratives with scholarship on intersectionality, raciolinguistics, Deaf education, and BASL's history to connect lived experiences to institutional mechanisms (e.g. Chapple, 2019; Collins, 2019; Hightower, McCaskill et al, 2011; Roth-Gordon, 2023). Guided by Black Deaf Feminism (BDF) and critical qualitative inquiry, we conducted an intersectional thematic analysis: (1) collaboratively generating open codes across narratives (e.g. tokenization; code-switching respectability demands; policing of Black Deaf expressivity; BASL de-legitimation); (2) iteratively refined these codes into higher-order themes that illuminate how WLS manifests across educational and community contexts (e.g. policing of "attitude," standardization logics,

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segregation legacies, community-based counterspaces and resistance); and (3) integrated thematic patterns with scholarly evidence to elaborate mechanisms of WLS and practices of resistance. To enhance credibility and reliability, we used member-checking among all coauthors, and peer debriefing with the faculty coauthor. In line with critical qualitative and Black feminist traditions, we also maintained an informal audit trail within GoogleDocs to capture our evolving codes, thematic refinements, and interpretive reasoning. As this study draws from situated narratives, our goal is analytic and theoretical generalization, supported by thick description that enables readers to assess transferability to other Deaf, educational, and raciolinguistic contexts. Triangulation across multiple narrators and established scholarly research on BASL and WLS strengthens warrants for our claims about how WLS operates and how Black Deaf communities resist it.

The critical social theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2019) illuminates how Black Deaf languages have been marginalized and how communities resist linguistic and cultural oppression. As Crenshaw's (1989) foundational work explained, intersectional identities are those shaped by multiple, overlapping forms of oppression—experiences that cannot be understood by isolating racism from sexism, and that similarly extend to include audism in the case of Deaf women of color (Chapple, 2019). Audism involves discrimination against signed languages with the preference for hearingness and spoken languages; it also assumes that being able to hear confers superiority (Humphries, as cited in Eckert & Rowley, 2013). As Eckert and Rowley (2013) detail the different types of audism, they show how "audism has both structural and schematic underpinnings" (p. 107). These underpinnings involve an audiocentric orientation to the world and audiocentric privileges that manifest in overt, covert, and aversive audist discriminatory practices (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). For Black Deaf Canadians and Americans, however, these forms of audism intersect with racism; Rouse et al. (2023) identify how WLS is audiocentric and "designed to prevent and/or eradicate nonwhite Deaf ways of being within educational, societal, and medical contexts"—while most research on audism's harms center white Deaf experiences (p. 4). Building on Crenshaw's framework, Chapple (2019) theorizes BDF—elucidating how "issues like the permanence of racism, sexism, classism, and audism play pivotal roles" in Black Deaf women's identity formation (p. 186). BDF further operates as an intersectional framework designed to bring attention to marginalized groups historically excluded or rendered "invisible in mainstream scholarship" (Chapple, 2019, p. 194).

Amid ongoing struggles for equity and accountability in the United States, highlighting BASL and Black Deaf communities is critical to BDF's intersectional framework. Recent media coverage underscores BASL's cultural and linguistic significance and growing public awareness, yet its acceptance and development remain essential (ABC News, 2021; Greig, 2020; Ingram, 2015; NowThis Impact, 2021; Sorenson, 2019; Still Watching Netflix, 2020; The Daily Moth, 2020; The Language & Life Project, 2021; VICE News, 2021; Waller, 2021; Washington Post, 2020). This article extends the frameworks of intersectionality and BDF to mainstream and Deaf education by synthesizing research on BASL and WLS alongside authors's lived experiences of tokenization and the intersecting forces of racism and audism. We call for antiracist practices that support Black Deaf and other Deaf students of color—efforts that dismantle WLS, advance language equity, and enrich cultural and linguistic knowledge for every student, Deaf or hearing.

Tracing Early Studies of White Language Supremacy

The term White Language Supremacy gained prominence in 21st-century scholarship, though links between language and white supremacy have long been examined by linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists under headings such as "race and language," and

"raciolinguistics" (Roth-Gordon, 2023, p.2). Smitherman (2020) credits Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner—considered "the first Black American linguist" —with revolutionizing a field steeped in "anti-Black racism and White supremacy," and paving the way "for the explosion" of research in the 1960s "on 'Negro Dialect'–these days commonly referred to as 'African American Language,' 'Black Language,' 'African American English,' or 'U.S. Ebonics'" (p. xiii). In doing so, Turner (1949) disproved (racist) assumptions that Gullah, a dialect of Black Americans in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, was traceable to British dialects, or "a form of baby-talk adopted by masters of the slaves to facilitate oral communication between themselves and the slaves" (p. v). Instead, Turner's (1949) fifteen-year study traced the dialect to slaves' African languages educating linguists about African vocabulary, "sounds, syntax, morphology, and intonation" (p. v). Smitherman's scholarship was also among these early studies of Black Language, including her 1969 dissertation and 1972 article written in Black English, which indicted "that whole heap of English teachers who be castigating Black students for using a 'nonstandard' dialect" (p. 59).

In this critique, Smitherman (1972) proposed a five-point program for teaching English to support Black students. She also implicitly illustrated how WLS oppresses Black students. Smitherman (1972) argued that all students need "a broader understanding of the intricate connection between one's language and his cultural experience, combined with insight into the political nature and social stratification of American dialects" (p. 63). The intersectional and political nature of cultural relationships to languages and their dialects were explicitly connected to race when Smitherman (1972) noted that those who "have the power to define reality; those dialect pace-setters, who in America happen to be white and middle class" had influenced Black students who believed that "white, middle class dialect" is "right" and "do not realize that language can be/has been for Black people in America a tool of oppression" (p. 63). In other words, research on WLS began in the 20th century–traced back to Turner's (1949) seminal publication on the language of slave descendants from West African countries (Nigeria, Liberia, Gambia, and Sierra Leone)–and the Black linguists and scholars who built on his legacy (Smitherman, 2020).

Following Turner, Smitherman's body of work over the past fifty-six years has implicitly exposed WLS. Smitherman's (1972) essay on her sociolinguistic study of Black junior high students revealed that while students viewed their language as "wrong" by school standards, none intended to "change their dialect nor that of their parents and peers," concluding that "only educational institutions—English teachers in particular—and the dominant culture" make Black students feel that their language is wrong (pp. 63-64). Agreeing with Sledd's (1969) influential article Bi-dialectalism: The linguistics of white supremacy, Smitherman (1972) praised his argument against the bi-dialectalist pedagogical approach "to teach Black students the skill and necessity of being versatile in both they dialect and 'the Man's'" (pp. 61-62). More recently, Smitherman (2020) paid tribute to Sledd's 1969 article when writing: "my boy, late White linguist, Dr. James Sledd, in a bold publication that sent shock waves throughout the language and educational communities [...] soundly condemned bi-dialectalism as the 'linguistics of White supremacy'"–suggesting that Sledd, a linguist who was active in the fields of English teaching and composition, was the first to name white linguistic supremacy (p. xv; Smitherman, 2003).

Sledd's (1969) biting critique of English teachers "in the role of linguistic censor" argues that the "basic assumption of bi-dialectalism is that the prejudices of middle-class whites cannot be changed but must be accepted and indeed enforced on lesser breeds. Upward mobility, it is assumed, is the end of education, but white power will deny upward mobility to speakers of black English, who must therefore be made to talk white English," and that this pedagogical "invention" was a "scheme" and "cloak for white supremacy" since the early sixties (pp. 1307-1309). This cloak persists today through code-switching respectability

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pedagogies and ongoing demands for White Mainstream English (WME), aspects of WLS (Baker-Bell, 2020; Inoue, 2019).

Today, bi-dialectalism is renamed as code-switching, which Baker-Bell (2020) condemned as part of WLS, asserting the necessity of theorizing language "through the lens of race" to ameliorate "theories of language and language pedagogies, which oftentimes perpetuate linguistic racism and uphold white linguistic supremacy" (p. 16). Baker-Bell (2020) underscored the deadly consequences of WLS and code-switching respectability pedagogies: "If we, as teachers, truly believe that code-switching will save Black people's lives, then we really ain't paying attention to what's happening in the world. Eric Garner was choked to death by a police officer while saying 'I cannot breathe.' Wouldn't you consider 'I cannot breathe' 'standard English' syntax?" (pp. 5-7). Baker-Bell (2020) argues that code-switching and "respectability language pedagogies," or the approach that teaches students to use language to fit certain audiences and purposes, promotes WME as the "acceptable" norm, "perpetuates anti-blackness," and "surrenders to whiteness" rather than challenging Anti-Black Linguistic Racism (pp. 28-29). Baker-Bell thus draws a direct line between linguistic respectability politics and racial violence through police brutality, aligning with Inoue's (2019) argument about WLS and racial violence. Inoue (2019) offers antiracist writing assessment and pedagogy as potential solutions to how English and literacy teachers can "judge language so people stop killing each other" (pp. 358-359).

Recent scholarship on language and white supremacy examine how language ideologies intersect with race to oppress communities of color across schools, workplaces, housing, and court systems (Roth-Gordon, 2023). These communities' experiences are crucial to intersectional theorizing (Collins, 2019). In short, linguistic anthropology has long shown how white discourse norms silence marginalized communities while "rewarding students socialized into white middle-class linguistic norms" (Roth-Gordon, 2023, p. 11). Studies document impeded learning for Indigenous students, court cases "in which Black families sued schools for linguistic discrimination and educational malpractice," and ongoing research efforts to reduce racial disparities in education (Roth-Gordon, 2023, p. 11). In short, our review of the history of WLS traces its roots to the early 20th century in the field of linguistics—starting with Turner's research on Black Language. The earliest coining of white supremacy and language was traced to linguist Sledd (1969) in the fields of English and composition—moving through Smitherman's body of work as an interdisciplinary linguist in the disciplines of English and African American and African Studies, as well as research in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, raciolinguistics, law, education, sociology, and cultural anthropology (Roth-Gordon, 2023). WLS' workings have also appeared in Deaf studies as interdisciplinary scholars of critical Deaf/disability studies and history note how Deaf peoples' languages are "racialized and policed like members of communities who use languages that are not standard English," (Henner & Robinson, 2021) as well as interdisciplinary Deaf studies scholars of composition and linguistics, respectively—who implicitly note how WLS privileges white, Western, hearing, male writing (Mazique, 2023) and dismisses BASL—positioning Black Deaf people as second-class citizens beneath white Deaf people (Player & Berger, 2021). Situating our discussion of WLS within these disciplines and broader contexts, this article's interdisciplinary synthesis connects our narratives to a conversation across academic boundaries—addressing the gap that has overlooked intersectional BIPOC Deaf experiences.

Given the breadth of disciplines discussing WLS, we define WLS as a structural phenomenon that naturalizes white, standardized, hearing-centric language norms as the only legitimate benchmarks for correctness and value, while devaluing and policing racialized languaging. WLS is reproduced through policies, standards, assessments, and "respectability" pedagogies that demand code-switching and ask marginalized speakers to adhere to (hearing) white, middle-class, Western language norms as the "standard"—punishing departures. WLS'

effects are harmful—limiting access and belonging, justifying judgements and sanctions, and sustaining broader racial and audiocentric hierarchies by oppressing BIPOC languaging norms in schools, workplaces, real estate markets, and legal systems.

WLS thus perpetuates racial, linguistic, and disability injustice—harming educational achievement, socioeconomic status, and preventing social justice. This article extends research efforts to reduce racial disparities by examining the Black Deaf community's fight against WLS while centering community as a core construct for intersectional theorizing (Collins, 2019). As Collins (2010) convincingly demonstrated, community is central both to understanding intersectional systems of power and shaping political action. As a critical social theory, intersectionality's attention to experience and community allow marginalized communities and languages like those of the Black Deaf community to lead efforts for "creative social action" (Collins, 2019, p. 188).

Intersectional Experiences of BIPOC Deaf Students

Following the scholar-activist editors who centralize intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) in a Disability Justice, Race, and Education special issue, this article's interrogation of WLS centers the personal narratives of Deaf "Student of Color experiences and educational journeys" rather than the lens of white scholars, reclaiming the power of (marginalized) authorship (Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020, p. 33). Of the six authors, five are undergraduate students of color or recent graduates. Three grew up as Black students attending Deaf schools (Oliver, Nicola, and Smith), one as a person of color mainstreamed in hearing schools (McCluskey), another as an Afro-Latina in a Deaf school (Diaz), and the sixth as a multiracial Latina with white privilege mainstreamed as the only Deaf person until attending John Hersey High School, which has a Deaf program (Mazique); many of us encountered racism and judgment for being ourselves.

Our schools never did anything about the racism we experienced because they believed it was just a misunderstanding. Menna Nicola recalls being invited to an event by a teacher who said, "I am trying to create diversity." Another teacher of Nicola's later confirmed this was tokenization. Blatant tokenization and racism occurred frequently across the schools attended by Nicola and co-authors Laniece Oliver, Mac McCluskey, Kiara Diaz, and Makayla Smith, and is not unique to our experiences, as it has also been reported by Black graduate students (Bell et al. 2025). Growing up in an elite Deaf school as a Black student was difficult and draining for me, Laniece Oliver. I struggled to fit in and was always judged for the way I acted or talked. Many people would be shocked to see that I was intelligent. Being a part of the cheer team, I dealt with many questionable situations.

I, Mac McCluskey, am Sri Lankan-American, which came with its own identity crisis and social challenges, such as audism and racism among predominantly hearing and white peers. Teachers' and students' lack of awareness about this juxtaposition led to exclusion from classroom activities, bullying, and my voice not being heard. In high school and college, institutions were more apparent about tokenism. Schools showcased me to promote diversity, and administrations found no fault in that. Meanwhile, in those same hallways, white peers would negatively call me an immigrant—both in passing and to my face. No one around me understood Deaf experiences—revealing the intersection of racism, xenophobia, and audiocentric hierarchies.

These institutions located across the country in the South, the East Coast, and the Midwest—specifically in Texas, Georgia, Maryland, and Minnesota—illustrate how systemic racism, including linguistic racism—is a nationwide issue. Anti-Black Linguistic Racism involves "linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization" of Black Language speakers "in schools and everyday life"; this marginalization as well as the "colonization, exploitation, policing, and stereotypes associated with Black Language is linked

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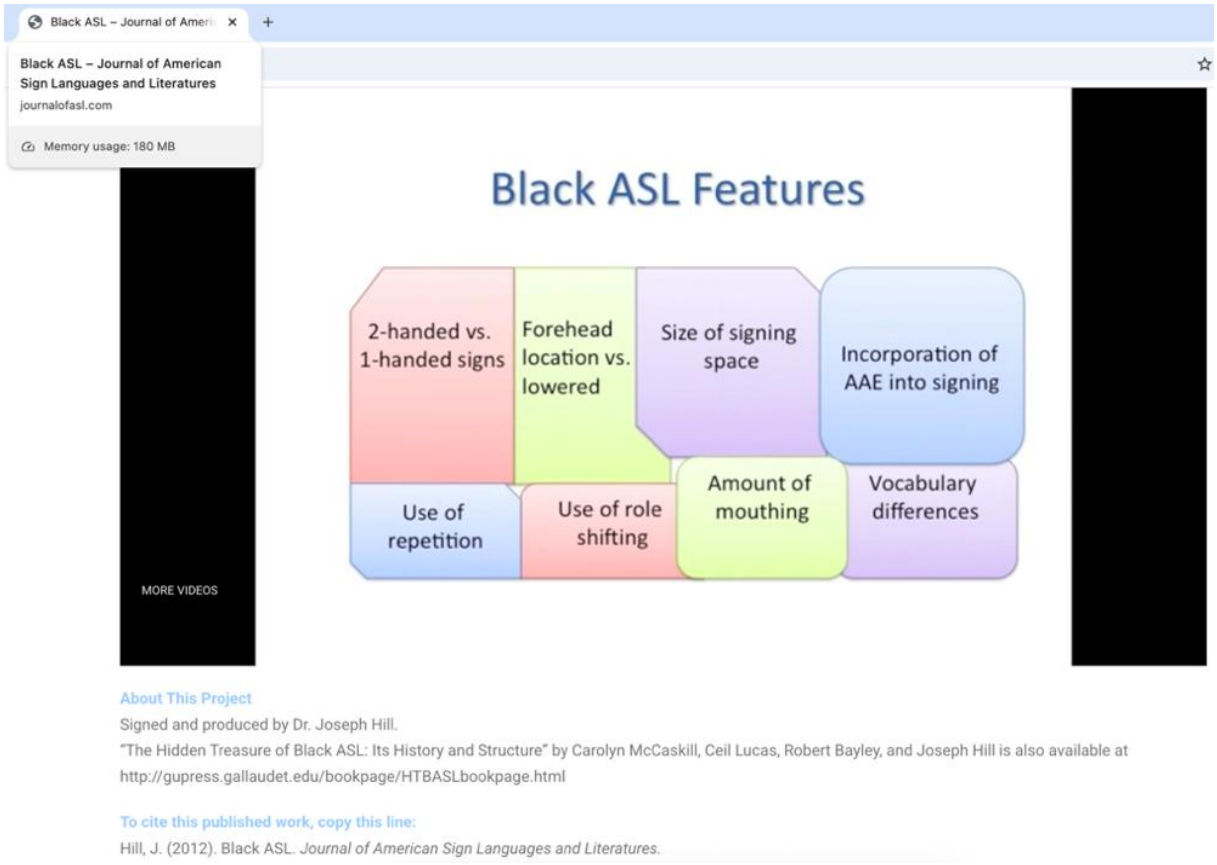
to a system of white supremacy" (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 11). In short, standard language ideology intertwines with racialized violence (Inoue, 2019; Roth-Gordon, 2023)—manifesting both as linguistic violence and as targeted marginalization of Black students' expressive languaging.

To examine the differences between BASL and ASL, linguists compared documented features of signed languages such as facial expressions, movement, and signing space (among others) (Hill, 2012). Specific features of BASL that have been policed or denigrated as "too loud," "angry," "thuggish," or "expressive" include the use of a larger signing space, movement, and facial expressions (Bayley et al., 2017; McCaskill et al., 2011, p.73, pp. 97-98; NowThis Impact, 2021; Sellers, 2020), whereas other features have been criticized as "wrong" or devalued in the same ways that African American English (AAE) has been denigrated, such as the incorporation of AAE into BASL, the use of 2-handed vs. 1-handed signs, and vocabulary differences (see Fig. 1; ABC News, 2021; Mazique, in press; McCaskill et al, 2011; Smitherman, 1972; Waller, 2021).

Figure 1
Black ASL Features (Hill, 2012, 5:38)



Note. These eight BASL features were identified by linguists Carolyn McCaskill, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Joseph Hill.

WLS works to privilege white norms of speaking, including white ASL, so words that are signed differently in BASL would have been criticized as wrong because WLS established the ideology that "white is right" (ABC News, 2021, 3:27-3:48; Henner & Robinson, 2021; Smitherman, 1972). WLS has also violently pursued standardized language through the linguistic genocide of Indigenous spoken and signed languages, such as Plains Indian Sign Language; Deaf Cherokee researcher McKay-Cody explained, "Deaf Native students who

knew tribal signs […] were told that ASL was superior" to their signed language (as cited in Vox, 2022, 6:58-7:31).

Illustrating some of these vocabulary differences between BASL and white ASL, Figures 2 and 3 depict the signs for the word "bathroom" as demonstrated by Hill (2012).

Figure 2
Hill (2012) signs in white ASL (8:27-8:28)

Note. "Bathroom" in white ASL

Figure 3
Hill (2012) signs in Black ASL (8:28-8:30)

Note. "Bathroom" in Black ASL

Expressive features of BASL include the head tilt, which we see when Hill (2012) presents two examples of BASL's incorporation of AAE in Figures 4 and 5 (9:43-9:51; Mazique, in press; Whitmer, 2019), such as the BASL sign for "My bad" (Fig. 5), which may be perceived as a "gang sign" and lead to dangerous situations for Black Deaf people, such as being held at gunpoint by someone who is gang-affiliated (Dutton, as cited in Player, 2024).

Figure 4
Hill (2012) signs "Girl, please" in BASL (9:49-9:51)

Figure 5
Hill (2012) signs "My bad" in BASL (9:43-9:44)

Both signs are examples of ways in which BASL may be perceived as "too expressive" or "inappropriate," as they did not originate in white Deaf communities and are visual markers of Black Language through the incorporation of AAE. For more examples of vocabulary differences or further linguistic analysis, see: (ABC News, 2021; Barnett, 2022; Greig, 2020; Hill, 2012; Ingram, 2015; Mazique, in press; McCaskill et al, 2011; NowThis Impact, 2021; Sellers, 2020; Solomon, 2010; Sorenson, 2019; The Daily Moth, 2020; The Language & Life Project, 2021; Toliver-Smith & Gentry, 2017; VICE News, 2021; Whitmer, 2019; Wright, 2019), as detailed linguistic analysis is beyond the scope of this article.

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Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, as experienced or witnessed by five of our co-authors, was often tied to our languaging–the dynamic and intentional process of using language to meaningfully communicate. Inoue (2019) argued "The practices of languaging are fundamentally practices of judging" (p.358). Language practices and race are interconnected and inseparable (Baker-Bell, 2020). As Baker-Bell (2020) argued, "the *Anti-Black Linguistic Racism* that is used to diminish Black Language and Black students in schools is not separate from the rampant and deliberate anti-Black racism and violence inflicted upon Black people in Society" (p. 3). As O'Neill et al. (2026) explained, language is both essential to identity and politicized; in U.S. politics, language "became a tool of political exclusion and a target for white nationalist backlash" (p. 106). Our experiences of marginalization, exclusion, tokenization, and dehumanization are rooted in white supremacy and implicitly related to our languaging—as linguistic racism often appears covertly in the ways BIPOC students' expressions are monitored and punished.

I, Laniece Oliver, was born and raised in Baltimore in a hearing Black family where African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and WME was commonly used. At the age of four, I started to lose my hearing and had to start wearing hearing aids. When I was in 3rd grade, my mother wanted me to embrace my Deaf culture and felt that attending the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) in Columbia was a great opportunity for me. I transferred to MSD's Frederick campus in 6th grade and graduated from there in 2020. When I joined the cheerleading team, I felt like I did not fit in—being the only plus-size cheerleader and one of the few Black girls on the team for my junior and senior years. During that time, I felt discriminated against and bullied. There were times when my coach would assume I was giving attitude to others. In one incident, a cheerleader and I were helping another cheerleader. While I was correcting a step the cheerleader messed up, my coach told me to sit down and that giving an attitude was wrong.

This stereotype that I was "giving attitude" is one that many hearing and Deaf Black people experience when our languaging is policed as "too loud" and full of "attitude." For instance, in a *Washington Post* article, several Black Deaf individuals share similar experiences, with one interviewee explaining, "'White people say it's 'attitude,' but it's just their style,'" (Aponte-Hertas qtd. in Sellers, 2020, para. 25). At the time, I felt so confused and upset because I didn't think I did anything wrong and, from my perspective, it looked like we were having a good time. That situation made me feel singled out and misunderstood from someone I thought would have my back. After practice, as we were walking back to the dorm, my cheerleading friend didn't see a problem with what I did, as I was very helpful to her. When it came to ideas and input, even though I was captain at one point—chosen by my peers—I still wasn't being heard or appreciated for my hard work and dedication by my coaches at times. Often, many of my cheers/dance ideas were dismissed. I learned overall that I should've left that environment, but I felt that I needed to prove myself in a place where I knew I was being underestimated all because of the way I looked.

I, Menna Nicola, was born in Ethiopia where my deafness was first noticed when I was three. I moved to Texas in 2008 at eight years old. Living in America was completely different than living in Ethiopia where there are only Black people and racial discrimination is not prevalent. In high school, I attended the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), which is well-known as an elite Deaf school. At TSD, I was the only Black person on the basketball team and sometimes felt that I could not be myself around mostly white teammates. Similarly, a woman of color student struggled with her identity and sense of belonging because "most of the d/Deaf students on campus were White" (Stapleton, 2015, p. 570). Research notes the need for a "critical mass" of racially diverse Deaf students so intersectional deaf students can be in community with others like them; this type of critical mass is important because although Deaf women of color understand and negotiate their intersectional racial/ethnic and Deaf identities

in different ways, a lack of community with others like them negatively impacts identity development and belonging (Stapleton, 2015, pp. 573-574). Community is also important for the "intersectionality and flexible solidarity" that lead to social action, as well as survival and resistance against anti-Black racism (Collins, 2019, pp. 159-160, 168; Stapleton, 2016).

Like Nicola's experience, Stapleton (2015) found that Mel, a Black Deaf student, did not meet another Black Deaf person until college and "thought she was the only one for most of her life. These experiences of disconnectedness cut across racial groups" (p. 583). Stapleton's (2016) study on audism and racism in higher education identified different ways Black Deaf students experienced intersecting microaggressions in schools. Isolation—common for Deaf BIPOC students—affected academic success when microaggressions created invisibility through "biased curriculum" and faculty's "lack of cultural competence" (Stapleton, 2016, p. 159). These microaggressions are one of many ways in which "everyday discrimination" takes place (Yang & Henderson, 2024, p. 52). Students resisted by creating "counterspaces or cultural enclaves outside of the classroom with chosen family and Black d/Deaf peers (i.e. familial capital) that allowed them to be themselves" (Stapleton, 2016, p. 159). Community through a critical mass of peers is therefore vital, explaining why Nicola sometimes felt she could not be herself around her teammates and why the construct of community—"often seen as family"—emerged as a crucial "site of political contestation" and resistance following feminism's politicization of the family (Collins, 2010, pp. 9-10, 16). As Black Deaf women, both Mel and Nicola share the vulnerability of Black women who are "disbelieved and undervalued" (Crenshaw, 2019, p. 19), an experience Oliver's story reflects. This marginalization occurs within both hearing Black communities and white Deaf spaces (Chapple, 2019), underscoring the need for "flexible political solidarity" as a form of resistance, an idea developed from intersectional experiences of social injustices (Collins, 2019, p. 159).

I, Mac McCluskey, born hard-of-hearing in Connecticut, was raised in Virginia and Minnesota. Being Deaf and a POC, I had to assimilate and code-switch to make others more comfortable. Attending six different mainstream public and private schools across the country and being the only Deaf person in all of them was a massive challenge for myself and each administration system. I was part of a small number of BIPOC students surrounded by all-white teachers and faculty, often singled out and rebuked for how we spoke at school. My BIPOC friends were told to "use proper English," and that it's not "appropriate" to use AAVE on school grounds. Accessibility was insubstantial. I had no interpreters or notetakers, so I taught my friends basic signs to help me get through classes. The teacher disapproved, saying, "enough of those hand signals, you need to focus," but the use of my own language was the only way I could focus on the class material, and the only thing that made a difference. This rejection of my language left me astonished, teaching me that my Deafness has no place in certain parts of my life. Teachers frequently mixed up the names of my peers because they were the only women of color, revealing microaggressions rooted in racial bias. As Bell et al. (2025) reported, BIPOC students are "often the subject of microaggressions at predominantly White institutions (PWIs)" (p. 155). These incidents that my peers and I experienced were often brushed off by administration as simple mistakes or consequences of circumstance, but the patterns suggested otherwise. This marginalization made us feel like we didn't matter the way the rest of our class did. We were continually quieted, having to code-switch to avoid backlash. Qualitative research by Bell et al. (2025) also highlighted how Black graduate students would code-switch to "protect oneself"—switching not just their language but also performing "emotional code switching" by altering their emotional expressions (p. 156). As Baker-Bell (2020) explained, this pressure to assimilate and code-switch to WME is an example of the linguistic racism we endured. Both avenues of communication I used at school were outright discredited, leaving me voiceless.

At home, my mother and I are the only Deaf individuals. My hearing family dismissed ASL as a means of communication, using only spoken English with us, expecting us to lipread.

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As a diasporic Sri Lankan family assimilating to their adopted white society, they bore pressure to rigidly comply to Eurocentric linguistic standards. Being a Brown family signing together in White spaces was considered too taboo a concept to actualise, resulting in the isolation of my mother and I due to the intersections of audism and linguistic racism. I still struggle to undo the lessons I learnt and bring my Deaf identity back into the foreground of my life. Yes, assimilation slightly alleviated the oppression I experienced, but it came at a cost, one that I am trying to reclaim.

I, Kiara Diaz, am a Deaf Afro-Latina with a family from the Dominican Republic. I was born into a Deaf family where sign language was always used, and I grew up a proud member of the Deaf community. I attended TSD, where I connected to my culture but also noticed unfair treatment toward BIPOC students. As a Dominican woman, I would use some signs from la Lengua de Señas en República Dominicana (LSRD), and my teachers would ask, "why are you signing LSRD? Here, we use ASL." I have also seen my peers face linguistic racism, especially when others judged the way they signed, or the way they communicated. For example, when we were in the dorms, many of us Black and Latine students would sign and communicate freely and comfortably, but when we were in the classroom, I would see white Deaf teachers criticize my peers and judgmentally ask, "Why are you signing that way?" These teachers did not take the time to understand our different signs but would criticize them as wrong. Dean Perry, a Deaf-Blind Service Support Provider and Black Deaf man explained that after he moved from a Deaf Black school where he "used [his] Black sign" to a white school, he and his Black peers were "constantly" mocked in high school for the ways they signed stating: "All the Black students had to just suffer through it" (as cited in Vice News, 2021, 3:12-3:42). Generations later, my experiences show that not much has changed in that white people are entitled and privileged under WLS—criticizing BIPOC signed languages and asking us to stop using our language varieties. Even when this happened, my school didn't act; the problems were often ignored or seen as "just a misunderstanding." Later, I attended RIT, where I encountered Deaf BIPOC students sharing the same kinds of struggles. These experiences helped me become a strong advocate for uplifting Black Deaf voices, fair treatment, and language access. I believe that schools and communities should support all Deaf students, no matter their race or language background.

I, Makayla Smith, was born and raised in South Georgia; my journey as a Black Deaf individual has been shaped by marginalized identities that intersect in complex ways. I grew up near Macon, an area where the community was primarily white. My experience in mainstream school was difficult and painful because of both audism and raciolinguicism—where audism, racism, and linguicism intersect (Mazique, 2023). One of my teachers punished me for using sign language by hitting my hands with a wooden stick, insisting I use my voice instead, trying to force me to conform to WME. Once, when I signed "thank you," my white audist teacher saw me, hit me, and angrily told me that sign language was not real. I suffered deeply from these experiences, feeling silenced, invalidated, and torn between two languages.

When I transferred to a Deaf school in the northern part of Georgia in Clarkston, I began to see a different world. There, I was exposed to a more diverse student body, with a significant number of BIPOC students. However, despite the diversity among the students, the teachers were predominantly white, and that environment opened my eyes to the complex realities of racial and cultural dynamics. I faced discrimination and exclusion, particularly from white teachers who often did not understand or respect our cultural practices. One example stands out: I was taught by my Godfamily to carry things on top of head, a cultural practice that is common in many Black and African communities. This wasn't just me—many of my childhood friends did the same. It was a part of who we were. When I demonstrated this practice to my peers; a teacher responded harshly. The teacher grabbed the books we had placed on our heads, threw them into the hallway, and told us: "This school is not for foreigners. You're in America

now—respect us as we are. You should act like we do." This incident left me speechless and hurt. The teacher's words weren't just dismissive—they were outright racist. The teacher failed to understand or respect our cultural practices, and, instead, she tried to force us to abandon our own identities in favor of a narrow, white, Eurocentric standard of behavior.

Because I had mostly white teachers, the lack of BIPOC English teachers made me feel disconnected from the language standards being applied to me. As a result, I often felt that my way of communicating, influenced by my cultural background, did not fit into the expectations set by the dominant White standards. I struggled to meet these standards, as they didn't reflect my own linguistic practices or the diversity of languages I was accustomed to. As a Deaf individual, it became even more challenging, as I faced a triple struggle: not only was my cultural language undervalued, but also my Deaf identity was often ignored or misunderstood. This created a cycle of audist and racist abuse against both my sign language and my spoken language, where I was forced to hide parts of myself.

Our Collaborative Research Journey

During his academic career, McCluskey, along with Oliver and Nicola, researched racism in the Deaf community, specifically the discrimination against Black Deaf people. We co-wrote two papers regarding our research question: "How does White Language Supremacy affect the Black Deaf community?" in Mazique's Writing Seminar course. Oliver's rhetorical analysis on Player and Berger's (2021) White Deaf supremacy: A legacy of racism and antisemitism, examined how the authors brought awareness to the existence of racism in the Deaf community and argued for accountability.[2] Nicola composed a multimodal rhetorical analysis of a companion video to McCaskill et al.'s (2011) *The hidden treasure of Black ASL: Its history and structure*, and McCluskey wrote an analysis of Hill's (2012) code-meshed[3] video published in ASL, English, and BASL. Throughout the semester, our professor supported our research and writing processes; after the semester, we decided to continue work with Mazique—aiming for publication at a time when journals like the Deaf Studies Digital Journal (2020) sent out calls for papers on Black Deaf experiences with language deprivation.

As student authors, we researched how WLS impacts BASL and found that some demonstrated how BASL intersects with AAVE and ASL, and originates from the time period of segregation (McCaskill et al., 2011; Toliver-Smith & Gentry, 2017); others argued while BASL originated from segregation, the persistence of racism maintained social divisions between Deaf communities—and that Black Deaf signing is evolving to be similar to Black English (Solomon, 2010). Still others found that different generations of Black people used White-based ASL for different reasons, but these reasons are tied to WLS as Black Deaf signers from the era of segregation viewed white ways of signing as "better"—whereas younger generations did so because white ASL confirmed their Deaf identity (Wright, 2019). Wright (2019) asserted, "Normative Deaf culture and ASL has come to be synonymous with white" (p. 43). In other words, WLS impacts the languaging of Deaf and hearing communities similarly. In short, the supremacy of WME and Anti-Black Linguistic Racism has oppressed Black English (Baker-Bell, 2020); simultaneously, WLS and studies of ASL privileging white Deaf communities' ways of being and languaging has denigrated BASL as incorrect or deviant (Gallaudet CBO, 2021; Wright, 2019).

Some question the necessity of recognizing BASL as an independent linguistic system. Black Deaf individuals face oppression through the dismissal of their language and its lack of societal acceptance (McCaskill et al., 2011; Rouse et al., 2023; Yancey-Bragg, 2024). Everyone

[2] This blog post is no longer available, but Baker's (2020) ASL translation is available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHDlFRKUn18.

[3] Code-meshing is "the strategic, self-conscious and un-self-conscious blending of one's own accent, dialect, and linguistic patterns" (Young, 2013, pp. 138-140).

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must acknowledge this marginalization and take accountability for biases against Black Deaf communities. Diaz, one of this article's authors, saw Nakia Smith, a fourth generation Back Deaf "influencer activist" (Greig, 2020; Yancey-Bragg, 2024), present about how BASL is culturally and linguistically significant at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) during Ebony Club's celebration week. Smith, known as Charmay, a strong advocate for BASL, uses her social platforms to educate people about its history and celebrate its users (Barnett, 2022). Smith realized that both Deaf and hearing people were unaware of BASL's existence (Barnett, 2022). Further, as Smith (2023) shared during her presentation, with visibility came backlash from white Deaf individuals who questioned why BASL was necessary, asking, "Why further divide the Deaf community?" (Barnett, 2022, para. 9; Waller, 2021). This question highlights the ongoing struggle Black Deaf people face and the need for flexible intersectional solidarity; "flexible solidarity" is important both within communities and across communities (Collins, 2019, p. 171).

White Language Supremacy's Impact on Black ASL

When BASL was not recognized, an entire culture was being neglected. BASL exists as a distinct language variety (McCaskill et al., 2011). Hill (2012) explains how BASL was developed during one of the darkest periods of American history as white Deaf schools did not enroll Black Deaf students, people were segregated, and languages were isolated. For many years, a majority of Deaf schools were predominantly white and mostly founded from the time of slavery, with the first Deaf school, the American School for the Deaf (ASD), established in 1817, to the Jim Crow era of enforced segregation, when Black Deaf schools "slowly began to emerge" in the South (McCaskill et al., 2011, pp. 16-18, 28, 31, 38, 41, 45). Prior to the Civil War, laws prohibited teaching "Blacks, whether slave or free, to read or write because the White power structure feared the potential influence of educated Black people" (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 17). Northern Deaf schools provided education for some Black Deaf people, such as ASD, the first to integrate in 1825, eight years after its establishment for white Deaf students only (McCaskill et al., 2011).

Some White Deaf schools in the South, such as Arkansas, admitted Black children (in a separate department on the same campus) until Jim Crow laws mandated a separate location entirely (McCaskill et al., 2011). In Texas, a man born into slavery, William H. Holland, a "soldier, legislator, humanitarian, visionary, and an educator, [...] was instrumental in getting the Texas legislature to pass a bill to establish" the first Black Deaf school in 1887; he hired several Black Deaf teachers (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 34, 36). However, systemic racism through Jim Crow laws limited Black Deaf education to primarily vocational instruction, even if Black leaders like Holland initially provided an academic curriculum (McCaskill et al., 2011). When Brown v. Board of Education sought to end educational segregation, systemic racism led to legal battles within different states and between white and Black parents, such as in Alabama, as parents dissented on integration; further, long after The Fair Housing Act of 1968, which some say marked the end of the Jim Crow era, Deaf schools in Louisiana were still segregated and were not integrated until 1978, a widely overlooked aspect of Jim Crow segregation persisting (McCaskill et al. 2011).

Similarly, although beginning to integrate in the 1960s, the schools for the Deaf in Virginia were still proportionally segregated in 1975 and may have remained so until 2008 when the school in Hampton, Virginia, originally a Black Deaf school, and predominantly Black thereafter, was closed (McCaskill et al., 2011). Hence, BASL developed in Black Deaf communities and schools through various social factors, but the rest of society did not recognize BASL. This lack of recognition was partly due to the lack of exposure to BASL after Black Deaf students who integrated into white Deaf schools "put [their] signs aside" (McCaskill et

al., 2011, p. 2). Over time, contact between BASL and White ASL resulted in "partial convergence" (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 116). McCaskill et al. (2011) were the first to conduct an empirical study of BASL by examining natural language use. Prior to their study, only small-scale studies existed along with "numerous anecdotal accounts" about a distinct dialect (McCaskill et al., 2011, p. 2). As it was with ASL, linguists' empirical research validated the language's existence, but, in the case of an intersectional, marginalized language, fifty years after the language of White Deaf signers had been validated.

WLS thus oppressed the Black Deaf community and "assist[ed] white supremacy by using language to control reality and resources" (Richardson et al., 2021, para. 3). Richardson et al. (2021) explained that WLS imposes "a worldview" that "perpetuates many forms of systemic and structural violence" (Richardson et al., 2021, para. 3). For instance, Bayley et al.'s (2017) study of BASL shows how Black Deaf people are continuously harmed by the effects of WLS to the extent that many think it is less respectable to use BASL. WLS created a culture where "white sign" is more revered than BASL in older Black signers (Bayley et al., 2017, p. 26). The general attitudes toward the Black Deaf community are quite negative; they are looked down upon due to who they are and the language they use (Bayley et al., 2017). As another example of the many forms of WLS' systemic harms, Black Deaf individuals are often perceived as lacking in intelligence; some of this article's authors have endured that harmful perception.

However, we are a community built on unity and equality, and we deserve the recognition we have been previously denied. To examine "the intersecting power relations" of social inequalities, Collins (2010) detailed five characteristics of the construct of community that make it "the heart of politics itself"; one characteristic is the creation of unity even when the meanings of Black, "community," (and D/deaf) remain contentious; unity is possible because "the construct of community catalyzes strong, deep feelings that can move people to action" (p. 10-11). Throughout an ongoing racial justice movement, the Black Deaf community continues to suffer from and resist WLS. We have been forced to exist in a world where we do not feel comfortable using our own language, a common experience for many minorities using native languages (Gallaudet CBO, 2021; Holliday & Squires, 2020; Powell, 2020). Despite this, BASL emerges as a form of resistance to WLS through stylization and the formation of linguistic identity. For instance, Redd, a Black interpreter and advocate, explained how race influences her language stylization (Sellers, 2020). Redd stated, "I'm always told by Deaf African Americans, 'I am Black first, then I'm Deaf.' White Deaf people are Deaf first and then white" (as cited in Sellers, 2020, para. 7). Her statements reveal how dialects such as BASL resist whiteness and white language norms to highlight Black cultural and racial experiences. O'Neill et al.'s (2026) examination of community through identity politics and polarization in U.S. politics also notes the central role that language plays in "performative resistance," noting that it is "a way to claim space" (p. 107).

Synthesizing research across fields, our findings point beyond individual attitudes and experiences to a broader pattern; in higher education, language judgments routinely map onto racial hierarchies. Holliday and Squires' (2020) study makes this dynamic explicit; they showed how linguistic racism on U.S. campuses is produced by raciolinguistic ideologies that make language a key mechanism of racialization. Their unsurprising findings echoed research "sometimes nearly verbatim" from two decades earlier: finding that students recognize how views on blackness and language are intertwined; students' counterstories identified how language ideologies "are not race-neutral" (Holliday & Squires, 2020, pp. 432-433). In predominantly white institutions, Black students critiqued the linguistic hegemony that required them to code-switch while most of their white peers never had to consider how their language is racialized and privileged (Holliday & Squires, 2020). These studies, however, focused on hearing Black students' experiences. Black Deaf students face additional layers of

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discrimination when raciolinguicism is compounded by audism and, for some, by language deprivation—intensifying the struggles of Black Deaf languaging.

In the case of Junius Wilson, the intersecting oppressions of racism and audism in the Jim Crow South were also part of the U.S. history of eugenics (Burch & Joyner, 2007). Wilson was "incarcerated in an insane asylum merely because he was deaf and black," sterilized, and deprived of Black Deaf culture and language for six decades, including the two decades in which the institution held him while knowing "that the deaf man was not mentally ill" (Burch & Joyner, 2007, pp. 1-4). The injustices Wilson endured are an individual example of a larger eugenic history in which "populations with unwanted or undesirable characteristics [were] confine[d] or incarcerarat[ed]" and which "also included segregation in education on the basis of race and disability" (Hill, 2023, p. 313). As BASL brings attention to the social constructions of race and deafness, it "resists the normalization of whiteness [...] and ableism including speaking ability" (Chapple, 2019, p. 194). BASL's simultaneous resistance of whiteness and audism—by refusing the demand for (white) aural speech-only—is thus a tenet of BDF (Chapple, 2019).

However, WLS threatens the existence of languages like BASL due to society's racist environment, as Inoue (2019) implicitly argues. Those in power continue to push the idea that languages apart from English and other dominant languages should not be a part of society (Jeffery & van Beuningen, 2020; Schley & Ramirez-Stapleton, 2021). English-only policies and the denigration of language diversity are especially harmful for Black Deaf communities since they continue to be oppressed on multiple fronts. Player and Berger (2021) stated, "Black Deaf people are still being treated as second class members of predominantly white Deaf communities despite our Deaf identities and cultural heritage of Black American Sign Language" (para. 5). Due to WLS, Black Deaf people were often judged on their use of BASL and their personality in general, so they would use ASL and "act proper," or similarly to white people (Bayley et al., 2017; Henner & Robinson, 2021). Like hearing Black communities, Black Deaf communities "face several social prejudices, high unemployment, stereotypes, educational disadvantages, [and] under-representation in political leadership" (Solomon, 2010, p. 3).

Many other discriminatory events harmed Black Deaf individuals: "The National Association for the Deaf organization (NAD) was founded in 1880, and they shut the doors on black people from joining the organization until their anti-black discriminatory policy ended in 1965" (Player & Berger, 2021, para. 10). Hence, Black Deaf people formed their own organizations, such as the many local organizations formed in the 1950s and 1960s across the United States, leading to the 1980 formation of the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) (Solomon, 2010)—100 years after NAD began organizing on behalf of white Deaf people. Racist power relations and the power of these Black Deaf individuals within their community led them to organize to "think and do politics"—contesting intersecting oppressions while empowering Black Deaf Americans (Collins, 2019, p. 184; National Black Deaf Advocates, 1982; Solomon, 2010). In the NBDA, many Black Deaf people were able to be themselves and use their language free of judgment; the NBDA meetings were thus a source of study for the Black ASL Project (Bayley et al., 2017).

Today, while segregation is illegal, some protest that schools still practice separate and unequal policies, such as the students, parents, and teachers who rallied in Brooklyn, New York in 2015 "to demand racial justice in New York City schools after a report showed Black and Hispanic students are increasingly confined to some of the worst-performing city schools" (Schley & Ramirez-Stapleton, 2021). In other words, due to redlining and systemic racism, students throughout the nation largely still experience segregation (Carrillo & Salhotra, 2022). As Schley and Ramirez-Stapleton (2021) put it, "the reality is that today many Black children do not experience inclusive public-school education. Inclusive education not only responds to

the needs, interests and backgrounds of Black children, but it also incorporates diverse learning—such as not teaching predominantly white history" (sec. 1). This reality includes Indigenous, bilingual/multilingual and Deaf students (Schley & Ramirez-Stapleton, 2021; Mazique, 2023; Schefers, 2026). As marginalized groups, Deaf communities (already) have a hard time with access, inclusion, and recognition.

As a marginalized group within another marginalized group, BIPOC Deaf students face compounded linguistic and cultural scrutiny. Across educational spaces, white ASL norms operate as the default standard, erasing BIPOC language, shaping language expectations, and influencing curriculum and assessment for students, teachers, and interpreters (Gallaudet CBO, 2021; Hill, 2023; Vox, 2022). These norms position BASL as less polite and courteous (McCaskill et al., 2011). Hill has noted how some white Deaf perceive Black Deaf signing as "too big" or "too expressive" (NowThis Impact, 2021, 3:51-4:01), a judgment reflected in my, Makayla Smith's personal experience of being criticized for my signing style. This judgment led me to suppress my emotions and facial expressions, conforming to (white) expectations, a form of linguistic and emotional code-switching (Bell et al., 2025). I, Makayla Smith, experienced white Deaf people's judgments of my facial expressions and "attitude" when they called my signing a "Black culture language problem," insulting Black Deaf languaging and reflecting a broader stereotype about (hearing and Deaf) Black Language and expression as "excessive" or "too much," when in fact they are natural and valid ways of communicating. These racialized evaluations also accelerate pressures toward ASL standardization (Bayley et al., 2017). Even as BASL remains most strongly rooted within Black Deaf communities, its vitality depends on resisting those pressures and affirming its cultural and linguistic legitimacy.

Without acceptance of BASL from the outside world, the language cannot prosper. Hill (2012) explained that many people did not recognize BASL as a real language because of the lack of research and awareness. Notably, when researchers identified the linguistic properties of (white) ASL, there was initially a struggle for hearing and Deaf communities to recognize that ASL was a complete, natural language. With education and broader support, ASL has thrived. The same widespread education and support is now needed for BASL. According to Greig (2020), Charmay's "videos have led to an increased interest in how Black people sign" (para. 3). With McCaskill et al.'s (2011) pioneering study, their body of research on BASL, as well as Smith's viral TikTok videos, more people are learning about BASL. Education about the structural and economic racism leading to "poor educational facilities and opportunities" for BASL users during segregation, and how this history "maintain[s] the racial disparity in education to this day" is crucial to creative social action through critical intersectionality (Bayley et al., 2017, pp. 27, 29; Collins, 2019). Society has a duty to the Black Deaf community to learn more about BASL so the community can be empowered to use their preferred language. Following Collins (2019), not until we truly listen to one another, and examine our own identities and experiences in relation to "experience within intersectionality, especially one grounded in the interaction of actions and ideas," can we begin to change for the better (p.158). In other words, intersectional theorizing and this article's focus on the "connections among experience, community, and social action" (Collins, 2019, p. 158), provides a way forward.

Conclusion: Toward Linguistic Justice and Intersectional Solidarity

The Black Deaf community has suffered enough at the hands of WLS and requires recognition of BASL alongside continued research. This article examined how WLS functions as a structural and ideological force that marginalizes Black Deaf communities, showing how the enforcement of white, audiocentric norms, language standardization, and the legacies of segregated schooling devalue Black Deaf languaging—whereas community counterspaces and Black Deaf feminist praxis enable resistance and belonging (Baker-Bell, 2020; Chapple, 2019; Collins, 2010; Collins, 2019; Lucas et al., 2023; McCaskill et al., 2011; Stapleton, 2016).

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Extending raciolinguistic and Deaf Studies scholarship, we treat WLS as structural, not incidental, and link classroom experiences to policies that privilege whiteness and hearingness (Baker-Bell, 2020; Eckert & Rowley, 2013; Hill, 2013; Hill, 2023; Richardson et al., 2021; Roth-Gordon, 2023; Rouse et al., 2023; Stapleton, 2016). Hence, the fight against WLS demands more than recognition; it calls for transformative action. Educators, scholars, and institutions must dismantle language ideologies that privilege whiteness and hearingness and cultivate spaces where all languages and identities thrive. Centering first-person BIPOC narratives that document tokenization, linguistic policing, audism, and racialized harm, we present analytic generalizations about WLS' mechanisms and resistive practices that readers can adapt across contexts.

Although our narratives are anchored in U.S. contexts, the analytic patterns we identify travel, as in the case of CBSL and intersecting oppressions in Canada (Hussein, 2024; Jean-Baptiste, 2021; Rouse et al., 2023). Comparative work across national boundaries shows schools are sites where language ideologies are produced and enforced, ranking varieties and communities. Internationally, researchers and educators are developing ways to challenge discrimination in policy and practice (Cushing & Clayton, 2024; Hill, 2013; Roth-Gordon, 2023). For readers outside of the U.S. and Canada, the core takeaway is to identify how racism, audism, and language standardization intersect locally, as "beliefs in the superiority of whiteness have global resonance, but local specificities are important" (Roth-Gordon, 2023, p. 2).

With recognition of BASL and how Black Deaf communities have experienced linguistic injustice, educators and scholars' identification of local intersections between language, racism, and audism can lead to action at both structural and classroom levels. Broader implications of this study thus entail action at the levels of policy, pedagogy, and practice such as:

- Recognition of BASL and CBSL (and analogous racialized/sign varieties in different national contexts) through formal acknowledgement of these language varieties as legitimate cultural-linguistic resources in curricula, syllabi, and program statements; retirement of deficit labels such as "non-standard" or "too expressive" (Bayley et al., 2017; McCaskill et al., 2011).
- Naming linguistic justice as inseparable from racial and disability justice in unit learning outcomes and public-facing materials (Baker-Bell, 2020; Collins, 2019; Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2021).
- Increasing Black Deaf representation among faculty, staff, and interpreters and tracking equity with disaggregated data (National Black Deaf Advocates, 1982; Schley & Ramirez-Stapleton, 2021).
- Funding and supporting new empirical work on BASL, CBSL, and other marginalized signed languages—to extend evidence for policy and pedagogy (Hussein, 2024; Rouse et al., 2023).

More immediate actions that educators can implement on the individual pedagogical level involve assessment and teaching practices such as:

- Adopting antiracist assessment policies and practices that prioritize rhetorical effectiveness and meaning-making over correctness regimes that reproduce WLS (Baker-Bell, 2020; Henner & Robinson, 2021; Inoue, 2019; Mazique, 2023).
- Encouraging code-meshing and audience-aware rhetorical choices, validating BASL and Black English (and other localized language varieties) alongside white ASL/WME and dominant colonial languages (Baker-Bell, 2020; Mazique, 2023; Roth-Gordon, 2023; Young, 2013).

- Explicitly teaching language ideologies—linking language, race, and Deaf history to help students name and challenge WLS (e.g. Hill, 2013; McCaskill et al., 2011; and this article).
- Changing feedback practices; shift from tone policing and "regulation of facial grammar" (Henner & Robinson, 2021) to content-focused responses aligned with antiracist goals (Baker-Bell, 2020; Inoue, 2019).

In short, this article shows how linguistic racism operates simultaneously at personal, communal, and systemic levels while foregrounding community as a locus of knowledge, survival, and political action. Even as WLS forces Black Deaf individuals to navigate two worlds: one rooted in their cultural heritage and another shaped by white-dominated norms and standards, BASL remains a mode of connection, culture, and belonging. If community is the heart of politicized resistance (Collins, 2010), it is also the engine of linguistic justice, which is inseparable from racial and disability justice. Recognizing BASL and Black Deaf languaging as epistemic resources, redesigning policy and assessment to stop punishing intersectional ways of languaging and cultivating classrooms where community solidarity becomes strategy are actionable steps toward dismantling WLS (Baker-Bell, 2020; Chapple, 2019; Collins, 2010; Richardson et al, 2021).

Drawing on Chapple (2019), we treat intersectionality—and specifically BDF—as a practical framework for recognizing patterned injustice and mobilizing action across research, pedagogy, and community life. In this spirit, BDF advances social justice through community organizing and centers three commitments we have emphasized throughout: the interrogation of marginalized intersectional oppression, the amplification of Black Deaf women lived experiences, and the resistance of whiteness, ableism, and audism. Extending Player and Berger's (2021) call to confront white Deaf supremacy to all who hold privilege, we call for flexible intersectional solidarity in the tradition of Black feminists—solidarity that is responsive to context and oriented toward concrete action (Collins, 2019). Following Collins (2010), community is not only a social formation that spans local to global settings, but also a construct that organizes meaning and power in everyday life; accordingly, community organizing sits at the center of both "oppressive and emancipatory projects within intersecting power relations" (p. 22). When institutions and educators listen to marginalized voices and enact flexible solidarity, we move closer to an educational future where equity is not aspirational, but foundational.

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