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Limited capital: a genealogy of culturelessness in (language) teacher education

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Abstract: Black youth as 'struggling students' is a persistent narrative in the contemporary U.S. psyche, both preceded by and markedly displayed through the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, which reflected coded language encouraging a return to the pre-Civil Rights United States. This framing positioned Black students as culprits for the ills of U.S. schooling – a continuation of a history of educational policy that discursively enforces the need to defend society against 'subhuman' populations. Placing the 1983 policy report in conversation with Zwiers' *Building Academic Language: Meeting Common Core Standards Across Disciplines* (2013) via raciolinguistic genealogy, I problematize the ways in which texts like these reinforce discourses of Black cultures and languages as subhuman, deviant threats to U.S. society.

Keywords: academic English; antiBlackness; language education; raciolinguistic perspective; teacher preparation

1 The miseducation of teachers[1]

I don't know if Cuban link and Nike Air Max-wearing Christian (Chris) Smalls ever wanted to become a teacher, but he probably would've failed the licensure exam. It's a bold claim, I know, but as an ex-aspiring rapper from Jersey, Smalls reminds me of the swaggy classmate you'd see kicked out and hanging with the security guard midday – everyday. Laced with much more than fronts, fitteds and durags, he has that upright 'my moms ain't raise no fools' posture and boasts an exquisite linguistic repertoire which apparently only pales in comparison to his visionary leadership. If the notion of Chris conjures up caricatures of violence and street life,

1 In homage to the album of the same title (1998) by Lauryn Hill, rapper and artist from New Jersey.

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you too may have suffered a miseducation (Woodson 1933) the likes of which Smalls' fellow Jerseyhead, L. Boogie, felt compelled to center in her own lyrical brilliance. Still, rather than being valued as an ideal candidate for modeling and instructing young learners, Chris would've likely been discounted as a potential teacher. Even Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, dismissed his capacity, calling him "inarticulate" and "not smart" (Reed 2020). Turns out, Smalls' is smart—smart enough to lead the unionization of one of the most fiscally successful companies in modern history, right from his workplace at the Staten Island Amazon location. Who wouldn't want Chris Smalls, someone with the capacity to both enrapture Gen Z and parlay with Bernie Sanders, teaching and leading the next generation of students?

2 Education as other people's property[2]

The purported 'underachievement' of Black and racially minoritized students has long been a topic of research (Haycock and Navarro 1988; Ladson-Billings 2006; Milner 2013; Roscigno 1999) which reinforces their portrayal as undesirable future teachers. Furthermore, the performance of Black students on standardized tests as compared to their white counterparts continues to be the central measure of their academic success (NCES 2020). In these persistent depictions, it seems education as we know it is simply what Naughty By Nature would call OPP – Other People's Property. The supposed global threat (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) that racially minoritized 'underperforming' students present to the nation suggests a preoccupation with the potential disruption of racial hierarchies ultimately conveyed as a concern for low standards and a lack of effort on behalf of Black students and their families in particular. The maintenance of these racial hierarchies as imposed through antiBlack literacy laws and policies (Willis 2023) have colonial roots that have been well documented particularly as they impact Black schoolchildren (Anderson 1988; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 2017). Still, trafficking in the assumed cultural poverty (Valentine 1968) of Black communities is facilitated through neoliberal multicultural discourses which affirm that all students possess value or capitals, but that the culture of Black students is a distorted pathological (Melamed 2006; Smitherman 1998) offshoot of (white) American culture. Thus, this antiBlack culture-centric rhetoric justifies that resources be withheld from

2 Other People's Property is a single from the self titled album of New Jersey rap group, Naughty By Nature (1991).

Black students due to their resistance (Dumas 2013) of monocultural white Americanness taught to them through 'abnormal' Black family (Moynihan 1965; Spillers 1987) upbringings. In this way, both educators and the general U.S. public are led to believe that cultural deficits (rather than racist preferences) make certain communities less desirable teachers of U.S. youth and others the sole proprietors of education.

The edTPA (Educative Teacher Preparation Assessment) obscures this racialized sense of ownership by unmarking (Mena and García 2021) academic language as a racialized register. The maintenance of white supremacy through commodifying terms like "social," "linguistic," and "cultural capital" (Melamed 2006), solidifies racial hierarchies by offering to the 'unintelligible' Black student whose access is necessarily limited to *capitals* of a lesser value, two options: either attempt intelligibility for the white perceiving subject (Rosa and Flores 2017), or accept pathologization (Nair et al. 2023; Privette 2021). The fundamental understanding of the capital metaphor reproduces the image of the culturally-bereft subhuman (Wynter 2003) Black student who must be given white language (Fanon 1967) and culture (Kynard 2013) or ways of being to interrupt their burdening of a benevolent nation.

This pursuit of social uplift, which is cast as either the responsibility of the learners or teachers (Kynard 2013) depending upon the (con)text, counterintuitively positions Black students as valueless and perpetual consumers of more *quantity* and *quality* capital—a euphemism for humanness or whiteness (Wynter 2003). The representation of Black students in particular as receptacles for white mainstream language and culture does not reveal that the ability to occupy white subject positions or to derive social benefits from said positions directly violates the logics of the capital metaphor. Fanon cautions that "[t]he colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (1967, p. 18), thereby rendering Black students in U.S. schools as cultureless and their cultural ways of being as commodifiable entities disembodied from the people who perform them (Smalls 2020). This continued denial of Black humanity (Shange 2020) is evidenced by the unmarking (Mena and García 2021) of white mainstream English (Smitherman 1998) through raciolinguistic assemblages (Flores et al. 2020) that cohere whiteness to legitimized language performance – what is referred to in teacher preparation as *linguistic capital*.

This work aims to trace the ways in which antiBlack notions of capital (cultural, linguistic, etc.) are legitimized through policy and academic texts.

3 Theorizing culturelessness to make it make sense

3.1 Culture as property

According to Senghor, culture can be succinctly defined as the way humans orient and respond to their environment (Wynter 1976, p. 6). Still, within teacher education, having cultural *capital* is represented differently depending on the reference. Zwiers' definition of cultural capital is, "the useful set of experiences and knowledge that are shaped by family and community" (2007), yet Yosso challenges that notion. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), she argues for community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) including sub-categories such as navigational, linguistic, familial, inspirational, and resistant capitals. The latter reflects a framing of racialized epistemic sovereignty expanding what is considered 'useful' to include experiential knowledge beyond white middle-class norms. I am theorizing culturelessness as a spectrum wherein cultural *capital* cannot coexist with race (Black or white). On one end, it would be redundant in that whiteness is analogous to humanness (Wynter 1992), and thereby culture is an assumed possession (Harris 1993), invisible and dangerous to the state to name. The danger in naming culture alongside racial whiteness is its necessary fracturing along precolonial designations inclusive of ethnic and linguistic dynamics that disrupt dichotomous racial logics. At the other extreme of this spectrum of erasure, Blackness and cultural capital cannot coexist because Blackness as a form of social exclusion (Burden-Stelly 2017) represents the absence or poverty of culture. Positioning culture and language as commodities reifies the propertied status of Black bodies rendering them incapable of possessing anything including intangible practices (Harris 1993) that constitute one's humanness. The need to acknowledge an historical shaping of how Black communities orient to a world that distinctly others them, becomes moot if culture and language are understood as entities rather than environmentally-informed practices.

Wynter's theory of the overrepresentation of man as white, male and Christian, has effectively been ignored in the social sciences through a focus on culture rather than racial logics and racism (Burden-Stelly 2017; Lentin 2005). This is evidenced in policy by the War on Poverty (Sung and Allen-Hardy 2019) and the associated word gap discourse (Avineri et al. 2015) which disembodies (Smalls 2020) and measures dominant and acceptable ways of being irrespective of sociopolitical context and inclusive of languaging practices. Communities racialized as black are barred from consideration as fully human through their historic inability to own property (Harris 1993) continuing from the colonial afterlife of slavery (Sharpe

2016) and domination (Aggarwal 2016). Language as an ideologically exclusive byproduct of political whiteness further legitimizes white worldviews (Keller and Levi 2017) as articulated from the position of assumed ownership even within academic settings. Those perceived as failing to subscribe to white western patriarchal perspectives are deemed subhuman, and further, marked as *languageless* (Rosa 2016b), rendering their ways of knowing as without institutional value. The inequitable distribution of resources, as a result of assumed unequal measures of human attributes, is managed through the surveillance and policing of material resources towards those presumed to possess language and culture – or linguistic and cultural capitals.

3.2 Conceptualizations of black cultural and linguistic poverty

Even as culture represents the distinctly human ways of conceiving of and moving through the world, CRT brings multidimensionality to Bordieuan (Yosso 2005) notions of capital shifting its center to race as it intersects with class (Leonardo 2012) and language (Flores and Rosa 2019) to produce unique forms of discrimination. Similar to Oscar Lewis' poverty culture theory, Blackness is equated to 'not belonging' and an absence of history compounded by a passive depiction of that historical severing with Black American populations. Culturally-sustaining pedagogies (Paris and Alim 2017) contextualize the colonial violence that ruptured Black Americans (and some Black diasporic communities) from their histories during chattel slavery and insist that these communities are not without language or culture. Still, critique of the unique mistreatment of groups considered racially Black particularly as enacted through governmental structures in the years leading up to the Civil Rights movement, was demonized through ideologies of culturalism (Burden-Stelly 2017) – or acceptable antiradical displays of culture. To thwart Soviet influence and preserve the international favor of the U.S., the critique against an antiBlack nation was subsumed under an assimilationist multiculturalism (Melamed 2006) which has since remained both the standard and the extent of 'cultural capital' for Black peoples.

To mobilize critique against the national housing, employment, justice or educational apparatuses became tantamount to unAmericanness, thus positioning schools as "an instrument of governmentality [in which] antiBlackness confiscates the body of the Black, distorts it for the purpose of accumulation and exploitation, and returns that distortion to the Black as reality" (Burden-Stelly 2017, p. 215). This distortion of the cultureless Black then becomes the site of exploitation for the ills

of society (Kynard 2013) as well as schooling which can only be remedied by depositing the missing human traits into Black students. When taken up through asset-based culture-centric approaches to teaching and learning, the invisible authority of whiteness can determine not only whose culture is 'useful,' but can position efforts to sustain (Paris and Alim 2017) Black culture as simultaneously threatening and futile – a waste of resources. When linguistic and cultural practices reflect a non-threatening and assimilationist standard, they are hailed as progressive, but to the extent that they force historical and political contextualization into pedagogical discourse, they are pathologized (Baugh 1983; Melamed 2006).

Since race-evasiveness permeates language teaching (Baker-Bell 2020; Von Esch et al. 2020) and teacher preparation (Chang-Bacon 2021) by euphemizing colonial issues of power as 'cultural' in nature, the examples of sociopolitical consciousness that emerge can reinforce dominant orientations to social hierarchies derived from the identities of predominantly white language teachers, teacher educators and education researchers presenting a raciodemographic (Milner 2012) issue in teacher preparation. This issue is one of 'culturalism' (Burden-Stelly 2017), which frames Blackness as a flattened and abstracted choice of expression rather than as a societal positioning deserving of material and economic resources. The type of internal validation which institutionally endows language (teacher) educators as equipped to evaluate the utility of student linguistic and cultural practices without sociopolitical contextualization encourages antiBlackness in language teacher preparation.

I have demonstrated how culture is framed as property which disembodies (Smalls 2020) it from Black populations and assigns it as an inherently white possession removing the need to discuss race altogether. In what follows, I will apply a raciolinguistic lens (Flores and Rosa 2019) to genealogically trace the ways in which normative language practices are qualified in teacher education through policy and academic texts which delimit what constitutes cultural and linguistic capital.

4 A methodology for Muddy Waters[3]

A complex, if not convoluted, problem such as the discursive use of capitals and their impact within (language) teacher education is best navigated via raciolinguistic genealogy (Flores 2021). This method neither seeks to identify an origin nor to resolve its phenomena (Foucault 1984), but rather traces and brings attention to

3 Muddy Waters is the title of Redman, elite New Jersey lyricist's 1996 album, which also reflects the common African American refrain used when our ingenuity along with little to no resources yields high value results e.g. "getting it out the mud".

the reification of racial logics in order to illuminate possible pathways for the disruption of white supremacy. For this study, I first identified textual representations of language and culture in the texts *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 policy document commissioned by President Reagan and completed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), and the first chapter of a widely used text in language education, Zwiers' *Building Academic English: Essential practices for content classrooms, Grades 5–12*. The focus on chapter one of Zwiers' work attends to the definitions and examples of capitals as they are foundationally relayed and drawn from in the remainder of the text. It is important to note that Zwiers is not unique in availing himself of fiscal incentives to surveil and police (Cushing 2021) language and learning (see Cushing's critique of Lemov's "Teach Like a Champion"), still, I herein extend similar critiques demonstrating how Zwiers' and others' assessment and curricular texts are fundamentally antiBlack yet have proliferated to fulfill a demand to maintain racial stratification within U.S.-based teacher education. As such, the institutional and chronological distinctions between his work and *A Nation at Risk* (published approximately 30 years apart) represent my choice in identifying them as not the first accounts of this type, but rather as ideal data since "genealogy provides an account of dynamic rather than static states, concentrating on the transformative, continuous, and mutating nature of objects of study" (Foucault 2002, p. 9; see also Anaïs 2013, p. 126). Accounting for conceptual consistencies across time and context provides lenses for analyzing these data.

Within these texts, I selected key portions that represent forms of *capital* or the commodification of language and culture. The data set was bounded by the portrayal of language and culture as entities to be possessed and protected. I therefore included additional representations outside of the specific term *capital* including *investment*, *resource*, *disarmament* among others. After coding for both possession and protection, a third theme, *patriotism*, was identified. Finally, I thematically analyzed discursive representations of *language as defensible* and *capital as limited* (through the conceptual frame of *culturelessness*) to better understand how Black students are barred from the possession of said resources and indeed are framed as threats to it.

As this paper specifically focuses on how notions of capital, culture and Blackness intersect within language teacher education, it is important to acknowledge that race as a socially constructed category does not reside within one sole ethnic or national group. For example, other racially minoritized communities-inclusive of Latinx students-are categorically treated as a singular linguistic and racial group despite their intra-categorical diversity (Clemons 2021).

5 Order in the court[4]

I present my case centered on the two texts *A Nation at Risk*, (NCEE 1983) and chapter one of *Building Academic English: Grades 5–12* (Zwiers 2013) which portray antiBlack notions of capital through the following themes: Language Must Be Defended and A Limited Supply of Capital. My closing argument frames the stability in the discursive representations of capital as white cultural property with the theme: Culturelessness in (Language) Teacher Preparation.

5.1 Language must be defended

Central to the 1983 policy report, *A Nation at Risk*, was the optimization of U.S. resources with education being framed as the commodity in question. In order to control the increasingly diverse population of schoolchildren, the document politicizes the bodies (Foucault 2006) of students as a threat to "American prosperity, security and civility" (NCEE 1983, p. 1). It cautions that "our nation is at risk" (NCEE 1983, p. 1), and that the "rising tide of mediocrity" (NCEE 1983, p. 1) is partially to blame. The watery metaphor relays a sense of being overwhelmed by something with a diluting quality leaving readers to imagine the types of bodies in this rising tide. "In the wake" (Sharpe 2016) of federal funds being redistributed from perceived users of white mainstream English (Alim et al. 2016; Baker-Bell 2017, 2020; Keller and Levi 2017; Smitherman 1998) and becoming accessible to Black and racially minoritized linguistically diverse students, this strategic use of language overtly targeted "the American people" in the form of "an open letter" (NCEE 1983, p. 1), casting negative light on the overall progress of the nation's schoolchildren within a mere generation of some of the aforementioned landmark judicial decisions. The term "white mainstream English" (Baker-Bell 2017) is meant to specifically attend to a widely accepted yet mythical standard (Lippi-Green 2012) of acceptable languaging that connotes homogeneity and superiority (Haddix 2015) based on social identity markers inclusive of race. In fact, the NCEE's (1983) report accurately asserts that at the time of its publication, "the average citizen today [was] better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago-more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature, and science" (p. 4). Such facts underscore the impetus behind the committee of twelve's (re)casting of particular U.S. schoolchildren as "internal enemies" (Stoler 1995, p. 96) in partial fulfillment of the

4 This 1998 album from Queen Latifah, a New Jersey rapper, actor and singer, called for sense making amidst various losses in the rap community as she defended her status as rap royalty.

imperative to maintain a racialized caste structure, one with white middle-class monolingual mainstream English users situated at the top.

In both the Lau v Nichols[5] and King v Ann Arbor[6] cases, it was determined illegal to use students' languaging practices as justification for tracking or special education classifications, respectively (Douglas 1973; Joiner 1979). The Lau case specifically cited the use of language as a proxy for "national origin" as a key determinant of the case having violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and called for "taxpayers of all races" (Douglas 1973, p. 569) to contribute to the education of said students. Nine years later, *A Nation at Risk* would conjure fear surrounding this attempt at equitable distribution of federal resources by citing secondary school curricula as having been "homogenized, diluted and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose […] a cafeteria style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses" (NCEE 1983, p. 9). Fifteen years after the Third World Liberation Front successfully protested for ethnic studies in California in 1968, this rejection of cultural and linguistic pluralism would subject Black and minoritized children to the othering logics of Orientalism (Smith 2006) once more. Despite their citizenry, the report suggests an equitable and responsive disbursement of instructional and curricular resources would place the country at the mercy of "an unfriendly foreign power" (p. 1). Even with a 30-year gap in publishing, Zwiers (2013) continues these logics in his hypothetical case studies of "diverse students who can become casualties of invisible criteria in schools" (p. 9), including:

> Sara, who immigrated to the United States four years ago from Mexico and "asks very few questions even when she does not understand the assignment" (p. 5)
>
> United States-born Armando whose "social English is fluent, but his academic English is weak according to his teachers [and who] complains that he is not interested in any of the topics that are taught in his classes" (p. 5)
>
> Kim who arrived from Vietnam two years ago and whose "oral language has errors, but she can make herself understood in most situations" (p. 5), and
>
> African-American David, who, per Zwiers, speaks African-American Vernacular English, and "likes school but does not like to use mainstream English in front of peers in his classes […] he knows there is a difference but does not want 'to sound white'" (p. 6)

5 In a U.S. court of appeals decision, it was found that despite desegregation in 1971, by 1973 1,800 Chinese American students in the San Francisco Unified School District were not being provided "a meaningful opportunity to participate" in public education through linguistically marginalizing instruction.

6 In Ann Arbor, Michigan, a 1979 U.S. district court decision ruled that African-American Language was a legitimate language calling for teachers to learn about it to effectively instruct children in literacy rather than placing them in special education classes and continually retaining them.

It is arguable whether law or policy had challenged the perception of Kim, Armando or Sara as threats to the assimilation of distinct cultures into a nationalized educational agenda. They may very well be the embodiment of the "emerging sense of national frustration" (NCEE 1983, p. 7) that the 1983 commissioned report suggested was creating a "fear of losing a shared vision for America" (NCEE 1983, p. 7). Ironically, the shared vision constitutes what Rosa explains as a chronotope (2016a, 2016b) in that linguistic homogeny in the formation of the U.S. has never existed (Wiley 2014) and the racialism of western Europe as expressed through linguistic and religious discrimination (Robinson 2000) traveled to the western hemisphere with white settlers. Nonetheless, what is undoubtedly invisibilized is not the criteria for success as Zwiers (2013) would suggest, but rather a privatized white monocultural understanding of language and who can rightfully use it – an understanding which had been "developed by its members over time" (p. 8) and which had "define[d] what is intellectual, logical and linguistically appropriate" (p. 12) in various institutions including schools.

David, the hypothetical African-American student is, of course, the foremost "internal enemy" as he is described as willfully rejecting white mainstream English, although his hypothetical rationale is not explored. The inconvenient conundrum that David represents is the privilege that alleged native speakers of English (Kubota and Lin 2006) only experience when it intersects with whiteness in that Zwiers' other examples are cast as being in transit from one language to another while David is locked into his languagelessness (Rosa 2016b). English both *is* and yet *cannot be* David's native language based on his description as lacking linguistic capital (Zwiers 2013, p. 6). As a gesture of othering (Bonfiglio 2013), David is depicted as both languageless and cultureless – a nod to the familial pathology referenced in the Moynihan Report (1965) – based on Zwiers' (2013) explanation that linguistic capital is derived from "quality and quantity" (p. 7) conversations with parents. African Americans, having been separated from their ethnic languaging through language planning (Baker-Bell 2020; Baugh 1997; Debose 2005) are considered as lacking both cultural capital due to their race (Zwiers 2013, p. 7) and linguistic capital, since "you can't speak African" (Shange 2018). David is portrayed as resistant to white mainstream English, which offers an opportunity for becoming an echo (Woodson 1933; Wynter 2003) of humanity through assimilation (Melamed 2006). This simultaneously opens an opportunity for a neoliberal solution whereby marketable efforts on behalf of well-meaning educators to fill in for the failure of David's parents (Dumas 2013) would elevate him from his "jungle status" (Fanon 1967). Whereas *A Nation at Risk* conveys students who fail to excel on standardized tests as threats to the U.S., Zwiers' (2013) academic text reflects a neoliberal turn (Flores 2013b) that marks the rapid acceleration of the commodification (Kynard 2013) of language and

the transmutation of language into "capital," along with the aforementioned forms of intellectual and social capitals posited 30 years prior.

In keeping with the legacies of antiBlack dehumanization, *A Nation at Risk* warns that students benefiting from this recent access to free and presumably equal public education were "coasting through life" (p. 9), forever at odds with the common good of the nation(-state) (Wynter 2003) which had previously enjoyed a "thirst for education" (p. 8). The comparison drawn juxtaposes eras only one generation apart, but it carefully avoids invoking Native histories to reinforce the indigenous erasure in the foundation upon which "this country was built" (NCEE 1983, p. 4) through its "relative isolation from the malignant problems of older civilizations" (NCEE 1983, p. 4). This chronotypic (Rosa 2016a) depiction once more fictionalizes conceptions of the past based on language users' racial positionings. Furthermore, in the report's attempt to demonize the pluralistic backgrounds of the nation's children now being served in schools, it draws on biopolitical logics that call into question the ability of U.S. schools to regularize the supposed superiority from which the country had previously derived great pride "generations ago" (NCEE 1983), in the era of the "Sputnik" (NCEE 1983, p. 1) –years immediately preceding the Civil Rights Act.

As a direct influence of *A Nation at Risk* and similar policies, standardization was determined to be the best means of controlling racially minoritized populations by reducing them to numeric codes (Deleuze 1992). This dehumanization represents an attempt to discredit the educational attainment of those most recently awarded access to public schooling, racially minoritized students. The counterargument to the educational improvement relayed in the policy report from one generation to the next was that those who *graduated* were not enjoying the same gains (NCEE 1983, p. 5) as the general population at large. *Indicators of risk*[7] cited standardized testing results to validate claims that the nation's students were underperforming. While labeling alone cannot alter the performance of students, Foucault (2008) cautions us that by changing the access to resources through categorical naming practices, we in turn modify the population by determining who to "let die" (p. 241) as a projection of the market economy onto government. To ensure clarity in the dichotomous framing of who threatens the United States versus who belongs, the NCEE (1983) reestablishes that despite widened access to education for the linguistically diverse,

> *citizens* know and believe that the meaning of America to the rest of the world must be something better than it seems to many today [and that] *Americans* like to think of this Nation as the preeminent country for generating great ideas (p. 11) [*emphasis mine*].

7 This references the section title by the same name on page 11 of the *A Nation at Risk* (1983) Policy report.

In other words, critiquing the United States to compel improvement in its treatment of Black, Indigenous and newcomer populations was tantamount to relinquishing one's citizenship and thusly called for heightened vigilance in schools. The "ample" (p. 3) documentation from which the commission derives this conclusion is rooted in surveillance and management such that nine of thirteen bulleted indicators are based on standardized testing, an evidential schema which works to legitimize the borders of whiteness (Stoler 1995) and retard the impacts of the Civil Rights Act.

5.2 A limited supply of capital

The NCEE (1983) laments students' lack of "higher order intellectual skills" (p. 1) and, as a result, calls for intervention and regulation. The echoes of these calls reverberate through the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 2010 as a fiscally incentivized (García and Flores 2013) standardizing tool for U.S. public schools that determines which populations fail to enact the "language of the American bourgeoisie" (Flores 2013a, p. 277). It is important to recall that prior to both the Lau v. Nichols and Ann Arbor cases, special education environments were (and arguably still remain) *de facto* settings for students whose languaging practices differ from the expectations of the predominantly white teaching force. Zwiers would agree that these differences are more than linguistic, and that "academic English" is a reflection of more complex ideas than "non-mainstream" language practices can provide—furthering a logic that would facilitate segregating (Kynard 2013) and managing racialized populations (Foucault 2006). Zwiers (2013) posits that the "narrow range of accents, vocabulary, and grammar typically valued by those in power" (p. 2) constitute the linguistic capital that "[f]amilies pass on […] to their children who 'invest them' in school" (p. 8). He then argues that the school-sanctioned, hierarchical order of knowledge reflected in this narrow language production is somehow "the most complicated tool set in the world to learn how to use" (p. 1), as it devalues "lack of clarity, lack of evidence, lack of focus and extraneous language" (p. 15). This line of logic associates white middle-class monolingual English speakers with the exclusive capacity for clear, evidence-based and focused uses of language. To ground this claim, Zwiers (2013: 10) cites a 1986 study by Sarah Michaels to further argue that the storytelling on behalf of Black girls is inferior in nature as reported by their white middle-class teachers:

> According to "standard" English-speaking middle-class teachers, children did not follow linear lines of thought, assumed too much shared background knowledge with the audience, and signaled importance with prosodic cues. Working-class African American students, especially girls, tended to tell more episodic accounts that shifted between scenes, whereas the European American students tended to tell topic-centered stories that focused on one event.

The likelihood of expressive agency, rhetorical strategy or cultural communicative choice on behalf of these Black girls is not considered in this evaluation, and despite Zwiers insisting that "diverse" thinking and its linguistic expression be acknowledged as equally valuable in the classroom, the remainder of the text outlines strategies on reducing occurrences of Black languaging in the classroom through teacher-directed techniques. The conflation between thinking and standardized expression is then contrasted with the language practices from students deemed as non-mainstream, namely "ELs, children of speakers of AAVE and children from poor families" (Zwiers 2013, p. 2). While the CCSS were widely challenged in their adoption, language education research responded to such "robust language demands" (Zwiers 2013, p. 2) through the investment in and teaching of *academic English*. Zwiers' (2013) text is aptly subtitled, *Meeting Common Core Standards Across Disciplines*, and his empirical work is cited in the central expectation for the use of 'academic' language (Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity 2018) required by the edTPA (Educative Teacher Preparation Assessment).

In many ways, the 1983 policy report demanded the theorizing of supports and approaches, like those offered in Zwiers' (2013) work, whereby learners "expand their linguistic capital" (p. 12) and teachers "work alongside students to develop and add new forms of cultural and linguistic capital" (p. 18). Building from the work of Jim Cummins, Zwiers (2013) encourages language education practitioners that all students have linguistic capital, but of varying "qualities and quantities" (p. 7). Similarly, Cummins warns that there are separate systems of language, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which require different types of input to acquire. Zwiers (2013) extends this language as entity logic to conclude that, "[j]ust as money and things are unequally distributed in society, so are the less visible words, skills and knowledge that give people advantages" (Bourdieu 1986) (p. 7).

What is invisibilized in this common-sense logic of capital is the construction of whiteness as cultural property. That is, the worth of what would otherwise be neutral practices comes to reside in their disembodiment and exclusivity. The value of whiteness is reinforced through an artificial demand, as articulated in this case through the institutional call for academic language. This deficit orientation parallels popular word gap discourses which promote racially minoritized children as languageless (Rosa 2016b) and thereby ineligible for personhood, since the exclusive academic register is not, as Scarecella proclaimed, something non-mainstream students can "just naturally pick up" (as cited in Zwiers 2013, p. 2). Perversely, while limiting conceptions of language to exclusively those of white possession solidifies language into an ever-ready resource for white students, these same raciolinguistic logics construe the presence of "English learners" and users of "AAVE" (Zwiers 2013) as constituting additional burdens on white students, school

budgets and personnel. The language of the Lau v Nichols and Castañeda v Pickard (Martínez et al. 2021) cases, which preceded the commissioned *A Nation at Risk* report, both discuss the need for what we now know as bilingual education to remove "language barriers" of Asian and Latinx children respectively. While federal funding did follow these cases, it is important to note the lamentation within the Lau decision that "earlier generations overcame the language barrier by earnest parental endeavor or by the hard fact of being pushed out of the family or community nest and into the realities of broader experience" (Douglas 1973, p. 572). In locating a lack of effort in the homes and communities of these groups, *A Nation at Risk* took up the same discourse in depicting an already overwhelmed institution of schooling and warning that it cannot "provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve" (NCEE 1983, p. 1). Conversely, the barriers cited in the Ann Arbor and Oakland cases refer to "Black English" as "casual," "informal," (Smitherman 1998, p. 104) and "nonstandard," (HRG. 105–20, 1997) reinforcing the diminished status of Black communities and their cultural practices. The discourse solidifying Black languaging as subhuman largely resulted from the backlash against the Oakland case, which ensured funding from the Bilingual Education Act would seldom reach Black schoolchildren (Sung and Allen-Handy 2019). Not only have the erasures of the Bilingual Education Act propagandized Native people as not having existed (Wynter 1992) or engaged in cultural or linguistic practices prior to white settler arrival, but the erasures in question have portrayed investment in Black communities as illegitimate, while further depicting language users of Black communities as expendable – as not worth the scant resources already expended (or wasted) on them. Since mothers and middle and upper-class families are framed as passing on an exclusive linguistic capital that non-mainstream students can only access through school, Zwiers' suggestion that "the rich get richer" (p. 8) in terms of capitals, directly reflects the warning in *A Nation at Risk* that providing access to this limited linguistic capital creates "demands on our schools and colleges" (NCEE 1983, p. 1). causing an "educational cost as well as a financial one" (NCEE 1983, p. 1). Taken together, bilingual resources were framed as wasted on Black students who were entering schools both without language (linguistic capital) or the desire or familial encouragement (social and cultural capitals) to succeed.

Bourdieu's conception of social capital highlights the restrictive nature of this 'entity'-based understanding, and the misapplication thereof exposes the contradiction of any capital (linguistic or otherwise) as something that one might earn through individual effort or that one might help another accumulate as an expression of a teaching competency. Both Zwiers and Cummins encourage teachers to consider the environment it takes to produce a particular register of language, but in

disembodying the practice of languaging from the students who enact them (Austin 2022a) they reify biological conceptions of who might benefit from these settings based on race alone. The NCEE (1983) similarly warns that access to civic participation should be based on "a shared education [and] common culture" (1983, p. 4) or else social actors risk "disenfranchisement" and restricted access to full participation in "our national life" (p. 4). The report further embeds a raciolinguistic ideology (Flores and Rosa 2015) in suggesting that "the progress of society" (NCEE 1983, p. 3) hinges upon Black and minoritized students' "own efforts, competently guided" (NCEE 1983, p. 3) which can provide them more "quality and quantity" (NCEE 1983, p. 3) language (Zwiers 2013) – a logic analogous to the antiBlack suggestion that they "be taught how to be properly human and cleansed of [their] bad habits through education" (Flores 2013a, p. 266).

A Nation at Risk (1983) warns of impending national disunity through the changes enacted in education during the years following the Civil Rights Act. This "disunity" serves as an indirect gesture towards the standardization of language implicated in what it means to be academically successful through testing as a nationalizing technology. Falling short of these restrictive measures was framed as a loss of "intellectual capital" (NCEE 1983, p. 9) and gave way to calls for curricula to maintain a "central purpose" in accordance with said measures as opposed to "cafeteria style" (NCEE 1983, p. 13) curricula reflecting the diversity of classrooms. Contrary to the allusions from Zwiers, the policy report warns us not to "scapegoat" teachers who are already "beleaguered" (NCEE 1983, p. 7) due to the "shoddiness" of unnamed citizens exacerbating a supposed national "fear of losing a shared vision for America" (NCEE 1983, p. 13). Still, Zwiers (2013) also reinforces the conception of language learners as takers of limited resources and suggests that with linguistic capital, "[i]f a lot is already there then learning is much less work, with much less likelihood of failure" (p. 8). This linguistic and cultural devaluation proceeds from an ideology historically rooted in colonial domination in which subjugated knowledge is "rearranged," "possessed and assimilated" (Mignolo 1992, p. 305) by the dominating class to reconstitute what counts as civilized. To determine what counts as language only to then restrict who has access to it not only dehumanizes racially minoritized students, it maintains the Bourdieuan notion of capital in its true essence – a resource to be wielded for social stratification, rather than within communal practice.

5.3 Culturelessness in (language) teacher preparation

Possessing language and culture within an antiBlack neoliberal context is paradigmatically a state of whiteness rendering the dichotomous opposing state of Blackness

as abnormal and without culture or language. One cannot augment the quality or quantity of something assumed altogether absent, and the framing of teachers as having to consciously teach their languaging practices to those unable to inherit them from their families is one that points to a subhuman starting point for those who have been conceived as naturally dysselected (Wynter 2003). The mere presence of non-white, linguistically diverse students in U.S. public schools triggered a securitization (Khan 2014) reflex of the Reagan administration which called for more surveillance and management of suspicious bodies. According to the NCEE (1983), the threat of "common culture" (p. 4) being rejected and the proliferation of the nation's sudden "confusion of vision" (p. 9) is a call to secure the borders of whiteness (Stoler 1995) that blur as a result of the enforcement of policies like title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which provided racially minoritized students access to education (Civil Rights Act 1964). According to Kubota et al. (2003), "foreign language study should enable students to critically understand their native culture and its underlying ideologies [and] about how sociopolitical issues of race, gender, class, domination, and power influence the organization of a particular culture" (p. 13). But language teacher preparation contradicts this suggestion by adhering to the logic of hierarchical cultural 'capitals' that simply cast Black students as lacking by virtue of the ranking of racialized norms articulated ahistorically and in opposition to white U.S. monoculturalism.

Social and other forms of capital are defined by Zwiers—as they are rather ubiquitously within the field of education – in terms of quantity and quality without mention of who is charged with making those determinations of value. What is useful for Black communities, for instance, would undoubtedly seem less so for others based on the ways in which they navigate an antiBlack world. Deciding on hierarchical notions of language through testing mechanisms does not negate the undeniable effectiveness of folks like Christian Smalls and his far-reaching linguistic and intellectual impact. Declaring that he is "inarticulate" and "not smart" does not reduce his influence, but it does obscure the histories that shaped his languaging and that of many Black communities. Alternatively, the various ways in which white mainstream English is euphemized, including "school-like conversations, school-aligned varieties of English, language used by those in power, teacher-like language, language expected in academic settings, language of mainstream teachers & curricula" and "English valued by school," (Zwiers 2013, ch. 1) all demonstrate immense effort in unmarking *academic* English as a common sense (Wynter 2003) entity as opposed to a proxy for whiteness. According to the CCSS created in 2010 and adopted in 41 states in the nation, determinations about language in the form of English Language Arts and through its use in other academic disciplines, are meant to ensure students are prepared for college, career and life (Common Core State Standards 2021). Thus, standardized expectations of

language across disciplines extends the implications of language teacher preparation to future civic engagement (Banks 2017) and citizenry of students (Ladson-Billings 1995) through the perceived use of particular linguistic conventions. While overtly pathologizing Black language users through speech and language therapy (Smitherman 1998) for not conforming to dominant language practices is seemingly less common than it was sixty years ago, the enduring logics embedded in teacher education through assessment and curricular technologies promote a similar result of redirecting resources away from Black students. Thus, the fundamental impact of linguistic and cultural capitals is a central concern for language education researchers and practitioners who are charged with discerning between linguistic innovation and error (Flores and Rosa 2019) despite the subjective and racialized nature of such determinations.

6 Flipping the script

I have taken a genealogical approach to deconstructing the metaphor of various capitals in (language) teacher education and argued that their usage renders Black students as ineligible for *capitals* (i.e., cultural and linguistic) in U.S. classrooms. The concept of capitals as used in educational spaces is discursively constructed through policy and academic texts limiting the subject positions of Black students in order to defend society (Foucault 2006), particularly via its structuring principle of white supremacy. The data derived from the source texts represent a depiction of Black and Indigenous students overburdening U.S. schools as they require additional quality and quantity *capital* – an extension of a fundamental logic of racial sorting that permanently positions whiteness as the idealized, fully actualized genre of humanness.

I further argued that the use of terms related to capital regarding student languaging practices do not reflect empirically advanced versus less complex (Keller and Levi 2017; Kynard 2013) academic ability on behalf of students. Instead, it reflects an effort-laden depiction of commodified and dissociated language as an entity which Black and minoritized students cannot own, but only mimic (Fanon 1967; Woodson 1933; Wynter 2003) – a framing that supports the tolerance of culturalism (Burden-Stelly 2017) rather than culture in the institution of U.S. schooling. A Black culture that is valued only for reinforcing white supremacy on national and global scales solidifies "particular visions of reality" (Allan 2008, p. 16) of Black students as cultureless – or as lacking linguistic and cultural "capital" and disrupting a national "common vision" (NCEE 1983, p. 9). This capital is represented across policy and academic texts as one inaccessible for racially minoritized students who introduce a "confusion of vision" to U.S. schools through a raciolinguistic

reification of the binary between normal and abnormal populations (Stoler 1995). Whether in classrooms or within corporations, through the metaphors of capital(s) vis-à-vis a framework of culturelessness, we can understand why Bezos' attempt to highlight how Smalls does not assimilate was meant to mark him as lacking various capitals and to then portray him as an untrustworthy threat. Chris Smalls was deemed "inarticulate" and "not smart" (Reed 2020) because boundaries are drawn around language in the precise places they are drawn around personhood. In contrast, I argue that Smalls, like many of our Black youth in language education spaces, is the embodiment of progressive liberatory possibilities and that a divestment from Black cultures constitutes a net loss for humanity as it tethers intellectual capacity to whiteness.

The peril of working within antiBlack, culture-centric, "capitals" frameworks is that of unwittingly wasting our efforts by allowing racism to distract us (Morrison 1975). These logics demand we disprove that Black students are somehow less evolved (Flores 2013) when we should instead be occupied with addressing and countering antiBlackness (Austin 2022b; Austin and Hsieh 2021) in language education. I do not suggest that Black students be recognized as having more or different culture/capital, but rather that culture as capital be problematized altogether. Leonardo (2012) warns, "The appeal for different forms of cultural capital is a distinctly racial argument following the lead of multiculturalism, whether intended or not" (p. 442), and I have demonstrated a steady discursive reflection of market logics used to portray Black and Indigenous populations as disproportionate consumers of state resources. Former education secretary Betsy DeVos cited *A Nation at Risk* as recently as 2019 in support of school choice giving credence to neoliberal logics that suggest each individual climb out of their abnormal subject positions rather than simply "coasting through life" (NCEE 1983, p. 9). Whether identifying the responsibility as that of Black students or their teachers, the concept of culture as capital is inherently antiBlack and, as per Robinson (2000), should alternatively be defined within teacher preparation as: "ethnoracial associations solidified politically over time" (2000, p. 62) such that it cannot be disentangled from the historico-political context in which it develops. Calling for the use of Black languages and cultures as a means for accessing white monocultural and monolingual norms (Kubota and Austin 2007), even if presumed equal in value, only makes the dehumanizing, entity-based rhetoric of 'capital acquisition' all the more dangerous.

In rejecting entity-based notions of culture, culture-centric frameworks that directly critique a white monocultural monolingual standard can also avoid the singular articulation of flattened, respectable (Burden-Stelly 2017) Black cultures by acknowledging that they, too, must resist standardization. Identifying the erasure of culture once groups are categorized as distinctively 'Black' or 'white' forces a reckoning with the exchange of racial currency at the cost of historical, ethnic and

sociopolitical formations over time; it suggests all people partake in culture equally (rather than having culture as a possession) regardless of who is racially designated as the ruling class. Conversely, failure to fundamentally disrupt racial logics by ascribing to the capitals approach to human practices inclusive of language, can be expected to reinscribe racial stratification even through proposed asset-based theories and applied language instruction. Subscribing to the analogy of students' language and culture as capital furthers the rhetoric of biopolitical (Foucault 1984) racism in subdividing the worth of groups of humans based on perceived differences and presumed empirical racial hierarchies-cultural or otherwise. In humanizing language as a practice, Black and racially minoritized language users should be invited to display the linguistic dexterity (Baker-Bell 2020; Frieson 2021; Kynard 2013; Paris 2012) they often enact as an act of joy rather than survival (Love 2019). This linguistic brilliance is hard-earned by virtue of navigating hostile spaces which seek to delimit the humanity of Black peoples based on the white perceiving subject (Flores et al. 2020). Despite imperial, colonial and racial violence, Black and racially minoritized communities have—and continue to—set their own standards in terms of linguistic and cultural innovation. Celebrating this, rather than sorting and managing it, is the very epitome of what it means to be human.

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Bionote

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