



Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English

By John Russell Rickford

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In Praise of *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*

""*Spoken Soul* brilliantly fills a huge gap. . . . a delightfully readable introduction to the elegant interweave between the language and its culture.""

—**Ralph W. Fasold**, Georgetown university

""A lively, well-documented history of Black English . . . that will enlighten and inform not only educators, for whom it should be required reading, but all who value and question language.""

—**Kirkus Reviews**

""Spoken Soul is a must read for anyone who is interested in the connection between language and identity.""

—**Chicago Defender**

Claude Brown called Black English ""Spoken Soul."" Toni Morrison said, ""It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language.""

Now renowned linguist John R. Rickford and journalist Russell J. Rickford provide the definitive guide to African American vernacular English—from its origins and features to its powerful fascination for society at large.

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Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English By John Russell Rickford Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In 1996, an America Online poll about Ebonics sparked more responses than did its survey on O.J. Simpson. And that's just a taste of the controversy and debate that Black English has provoked over the years. Called "Spoken Soul" by Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, the dialect of African Americans has been lauded, derided, questioned, and discussed for decades, but never so comprehensively and fairly as in this historic, sociologic, and linguistic overview and analysis by John Russell Rickford (the Martin Luther King Jr. Centennial Professor of Linguistics at Stanford University) and Russell John Rickford (a journalist, formerly of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*).

They discuss the attitudinal impact of socioeconomic factors, as well as the effect of generation and gender. They look at the place of black vernacular in literature and family, identity and culture, education and politics. And they track previous debates, from Paul Laurence Dunbar's considerations in the late 1800s to the black intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance to the issues raised by the civil rights movement of the 1960s to the recent Ebonics discourse.

Part 2, entitled "This Passion, This Skill, This Incredible Music," takes a close look at the richness of Spoken Soul, as recorded in literature (both black and white), from John Leacock's 1776 play *The Fall of British Tyranny* to DMX's rap lyrics of today. They look at the language of preachers and comedians, actors and singers, and scores of writers, and then they delve deeper, into the components of the living language, examining the vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and history of the black vernacular. And finally, the Rickfords discuss the role of Spoken Soul in terms of African American identity. The result? A thoughtful, erudite, and provocative narrative that lifts the discussion of Black English out of the knee-jerk negativity that arose from the Ebonics controversy of 1996 and into the loftier and more appropriate realms of linguistics, literature, and culture. --*Stephanie Gold*

From Kirkus Reviews

A lively, well-documented history of Black English with particular focus on the recent Ebonics controversy. John Russell Rickford (Linguistics/Stanford Univ.) and Russell John Rickford, a Philadelphia Inquirer reporter, dispel myths that Black English is simply substandard English. Too many people took the Oakland, California school board's decision on Ebonics to be "one more spirited attempt at multiculturalism." The authors contend that Spoken Soul, the dialect of African-Americans, is rich and potent, with a distinct, consistent pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar largely derived from African roots. For example, the ubiquitous "be" fills in the gap for a missing past and present continuous verb in standard English, and "teses" is a correct plural for "tests" to avoid a triple-consonant ending. Though they agree that all African-Americans must master standard English for survival in school and success in the business world, they emphasize the value of Spoken Soul as a linguistic tool not only among black people, but in society at large. Culling examples from the work of such acclaimed writers as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Maya Angelou, they show how even writers who had ambivalent feelings towards Black English employed it to enrich American literature. Preachers, lyricists, and comedians still use it. How then can educators teach their students standard English without debasing a rich oral linguistic tradition? They must, insist the authors, develop an awareness and appreciation of Spoken Soul. They must avoid thinking of Black English as "bad English" or "lazy English." They must learn its distinct grammar and pronunciation so that they can contrast it with standard English. Only then will they be equipped to teach the masses of black youngsters the language skills they need to survive in the larger world. A polemic that will enlighten and inform not only educators, for whom it should be required reading, but all who value and question language. -- *Copyright*

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From the Back Cover

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jeffrey Thompson:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open as well as read a book called *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have additional opinion?

Teresa Dillard:

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Robert Stewart:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent that they free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity this is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book which you read you can spent all day every day to reading a publication. The book Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English it is rather good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book offers high quality.

Ronny Baird:

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