JOHN BAUGH. **Beyond Ebonics:** Linguistic pride and racial prejudice. 2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xx, 149.

B's primary goal in this book is to accelerate the progress of linguistic tolerance in America. Without this fundamental reform, he contends, efforts to improve educational policy for Standard English Proficiency (SEP) will be plagued by the problems so well illustrated by the Ebonics controversy. B hopes to 'dispel uninformed and divisive myths about the linguistic consequences of the African slave trade' (xiii) in order to work towards educational reform. In a rare starring appearance by linguistics on the world stage, gross misinterpretations and media propaganda ignited fervent, but largely ignorant, opinions from legislators, scholars and the general public. Detractors spanned ethnic and racial spectrums, with public statements from Kweisi Mfume, Maya Angelou, Bill Cosby and Secretary of Education Richard Riley. Besieged by these declarations and prevailing linguistic prejudice, the Oakland School Board's Ebonics resolution to address poor academic performance of African-American students was doomed to failure. This cohesive work unites an in-depth analysis of the complex subjugating factors with a vibrant historical account.

Defined in 1973 as the linguistic legacy of the African and European slave trade, Ebonics underwent extensive research and numerous reclassifications over subsequent decades. B maintains that the definition became so elastic among linguists that it was vulnerable to distortion and indefensibility both within and outside the field. The initial 1996 Oakland resolution declared that Ebonics was not a dialect of English, and while the 1997 revised text included Ebonics as a dialect, students were still contradictorily referred to as learners of a second language. Although Oakland denied it would pursue Title VII funds supporting ESL programs, its intentions were fiercely attacked, particularly in view of the dearth of Federal funding for SEP.

Labov's U.S. Senate address in 1997 defined Ebonics (using the LSA label of African American Vernacular English) as 'not a set of slang words, or a random set of grammatical mistakes, but a well-formed set of rules of grammar and pronunciation that is capable of conveying complex logic and reasoning' (59). Recognizing the systematic legitimacy of a dialect prevents neither the acknowledgement that skills in a standard dialect can provide definite advantages for the speaker, nor the academic goal to develop those skills. However, Ebonics was, and continues to be, popularly referred to as bad or broken English and street slang. This linguistic bigotry reared its ugly head in the form of devastating satire. Articles and cartoons ridiculing Ebonics appeared across the country in publications ranging from the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* to *Mad Magazine*. The –bonics suffix was commonly used (i.e., mathebonics) to denote dismal performance in a multitude of areas. Legislators and pundits rapidly voiced their condemnation, sharing the unfounded conclusion that Oakland's objective was not to achieve SEP, but rather to add Ebonics to the curriculum.

After the frenzy subsided and Oakland implemented an SEP program devoid of references to Ebonics, other American school districts were left without a plan for educational reform. In the broader view, dialectical chauvinism still saturates American culture and will inundate future improvement efforts. Striving for a better outcome, B recommends a three-fold approach that begins with an ongoing linguistic equality program to educate scholars, policy-makers, the media and the public. Next, unless more suitable funding sources are identified similar to funding for Hawaiian Pidgin English, the Title VII definitions should be expanded to include dialects of English. At this point, an SEP program could be implemented in conjunction with cultural-awareness classes intended to introduce and cultivate a positive view of America's linguistic diversity. B's well-developed case is supported by the inclusion of the Oakland and LSA resolutions, California and Texas legislative actions, and details of the Ebonics hearings. These

references contribute to this volume's elevation beyond expert opinion into the realm of educational and cultural resources.

B's goal for 'a future in which linguistic bigotry becomes a relic of the past' (xiii) is as undeniably admirable as his educational reform reasoning is sound, but America's distance from that future is troubling. What degree of enlightenment will be required in societies that allow any dialect variation, whether minimal or substantial, to shape judgments of character, intelligence and worth? How far down the path of tolerance must the society be before an SEP program can be successful? Providing for the educational needs of these students is long overdue, but the prohibiting factors are so firmly entrenched that countless generations are likely to continue to pass through our school systems unaided.

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