



# 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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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Gracie Thomas:**

Hey guys, do you would like to finds a new book to learn? May be the book with the headline *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* suitable to you? The particular book was written by famous writer in this era. The actual book untitled *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* is one of several books that will everyone read now. That book was inspired many men and women in the world. When you read this publication you will enter the new age that you ever know just before. The author explained their concept in the simple way, and so all of people can easily to comprehend the core of this guide. This book will give you a great deal of information about this world now. To help you to see the represented of the world in this book.

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**Malcolm Lee:**

People live in this new moment of lifestyle always try and must have the spare time or they will get lots of stress from both way of life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not a robot. Then we question again, what kind of activity do you possess when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will probably unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is usually Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English.

**Shari Villa:**

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