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**BLACK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: COMMUNICATIONS
BARRIER, LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

by

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BLACK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:
COMMUNICATIONS BARRIER, LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Joseph M. Gratto", is written over a horizontal line.

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BLACK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:
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A decade ago in the United States, Civil Rights legislation was passed which removed any trace of legal status for discriminatory actions taken on the basis of race, sex, or religion. Equal rights seemed to be an idea whose time had come, and far-reaching legislation which outlawed discrimination and provided easy access to the courts in cases where discrimination was alleged became the law of the land. The Civil Rights legislation was broadly supported, and its passage seemed to reflect the general will of the people. It seems ironic and tragic that the aftermath of the Civil Rights legislation has been a period of racial turbulence, unmatched in any decade of the many in U.S. history during which "Jim Crow" laws prevailed in many places; and when even in states and cities where discrimination had no legal status, segregation flourished through custom or simply out of habit.

Unfortunately, racial turbulence has occurred in the Armed Forces just as it occurred with the population-at-large, notwithstanding the fact that integration of the Armed Forces has been undertaken more completely and for longer than it has elsewhere in our nation.

Why did not the Armed Forces fare any better than other major institutional elements of American society during the decade of racial confrontation? Certainly the will has

generally been present in the top leadership. A lengthy documentation of the attention of service secretaries and service chiefs to the general subject of human relations could be assembled to support the contention that the services' record in attempting to promote racial harmony would compare most favorably with the record of most corporate, institutional, or political groups during the same period. Nevertheless, a number of racial incidents of a serious nature have occurred, and the evidence of a certain alienation of affection is manifest in dealings of the various minority members of the Armed Forces with their white counterparts.

I submit that despite the best of intentions, U.S. military leadership at all levels has failed to equip itself with sufficient understanding of the basic precepts of the human communications process to deal adequately with minority personnel now that they have become more visible, more vocal, and more numerous. We have not been effective in communicating with our personnel. We have not been effective in receiving and interpreting the communications they have directed to us, and we have generally been blissfully unaware that there was a communications problem at all. Indeed, since we can all read, write and speak, and scarcely can recall having met an adult who could not do likewise, it is easy to assume that communications is simply a matter of doing what comes

naturally, rather than a complex and intricate process.

Communication between humans is analogous to establishing communications between two radio transmitter-receivers. If both are on the same frequency to start with, all you have to do is start talking. If they are a little out of tune, and you know how to tune them in, you do so and communication is established. If they are altogether out of tune with one another, and either operator has the skill and patience to tune his transmitter to the other fellow's frequency, then communications can be established despite the fact that perhaps only one party in the communications network is really working to keep communications going. But in the worst case, the radios may be out of tune, and neither operator has the skill or motivation to try and correct the problem. Then, instead of communications, there is none; and in all likelihood, both parties are angry because they cannot communicate, even though neither has made any reasonable effort.

Communications theory provides the tools to tune in on the other fellow's frequency. Black language and black culture represent the other fellow's frequency. This paper will not attempt to treat communications theory, or black language and culture, exhaustively. It will, however, introduce the reader to these subjects and suggest the importance of a knowledge of all three subjects to the aspiring leader.

Finally, it will identify several specific, positive steps which communications theory suggests will greatly improve the leader's ability to respond to the challenge of overcoming the communication barrier between whites and blacks.

Communication theory and common sense both suggest that the purpose of communication is not solely to get something off the mind of the sender, but to get something into the mind of the receiver. Communication is based on the simple premise that ideas can be reduced to words, gestures and expressions which will trigger in the mind of the person who hears the words, and sees the expressions and gestures, a similar idea or ideas.

The theory begins to break down almost immediately, of course, because everyone experiences the world a little differently. Simple ideas are not too difficult. If one says the word "sun," for example, most people would be unlikely to misunderstand what the word served as a symbol for. The level of abstraction for common nouns is not high. If the word were "sunrise," however, the idea which would be conveyed might vary. People who lived near the water would visualize the sunrise one way. People who lived near the arctic circle would visualize it another way, perhaps attaching to the idea of sunrise certain emotions which the inhabitants of the temperate zones would not understand because in the arctic the sun doesn't routinely rise and

set every day as it does elsewhere.

If the level of abstraction were raised a little more, using the expression "Easter sunrise service" instead of "sun" or "sunrise" then it becomes evident that the idea conveyed by the expression will mean an even greater variety of things to different people. To a non-Christian, or a person from an area in which such services are not common, the expression may mean nothing. Certainly a person who has never experienced or at least heard or read of such a service could not be expected to have a predictable mental response to the words. On the other hand, a minister who works hard preparing for such services will certainly have a response. A little old lady who looks forward to such services will have a response. A child who dreads being pulled from a warm bed Easter morning and taken out to some cold, damp meadow for a shot of organized religion will also have a response. But it is evident that all respond slightly, or perhaps even significantly, differently to the same verbal stimulus.

The problem of communicating would become hopeless if it were not essential. Fortunately, however, most people want to communicate, and manage to do so because if an idea like "Easter sunrise service" is not understood, it can usually be broken down into its components and explained in terms with low levels of abstraction, or illustrated, or

if time permits, the individual who does not understand the term might even be taken to the event the words represent.

Equally important to general understanding of communications is the role of context. Words routinely have more than one meaning, and they take on a meaning partially as a result of their context in the sentence in which they are uttered, or in the context of the situation in which they are uttered. A fireman yelling "water," and a hospital patient muttering "water" use precisely the same word in different contexts. For the one, the response is likely to be a hose hitched on a hydrant and hundreds of gallons of water pumped out at great pressure. For the other the response will be a glass of water, perhaps, or maybe no water, if he is not supposed to have any. Context governs, and does so with great efficiency. It is barely conceivable that the fireman will be given a glass of water with which to stem the blaze, or that the patient will be given a fire-hose with which to slake his thirst.

Common language accomplishes for its users the function of providing words which have generally accepted meanings. A word is only sounds or letters, but it can mean whatever people agree to have it mean. If a new experience or idea evolves, such as space exploration, new words are coined to describe it, or new meanings are provided for old words. Similarly if a word represents an idea or thing which

is no longer in existence, the word may stop meaning anything. A century ago, when horses were society's prime mover, a word like whipple-tree would have meant something to almost anyone. Hydramatic drive would have meant nothing. Times change, and languages do also. So even among speakers of the same language, words will have a slightly different meaning depending on age, experiences, and education,

Common culture comes to the rescue, however. People who live in the same area, or for other reasons such as similar education or social class, experience many things in a common way, obviously will have a relatively common frame of reference. They are able to communicate freely and easily concerning all the everyday things of life because they have a common point of view, a shared context. In their dealings with one another, it is not necessary to stop and explain many things using terms which have low levels of abstraction. Whatever "sun," "sunrise" and "Easter sunrise service" mean to people with a common cultural point of view, it means generally the same thing to all of them. Facial expressions, gestures, taboos, obscenities, blasphemies, endearing terms, all such things are the shared property of people who are culturally similar. They know when they are using friendly terms, and when they are being insulting; when they are joking and when they are serious.

If an outsider entered a group where all others had a common culture, however, he would imperfectly understand them although they might speak the same language. Likewise, when a person who is accustomed to functioning primarily among his peers in a group with pronounced shared context or culture is forced to operate outside such a group, he finds the situation distressing because he will be forced to be quite literal in his expression, and will be deprived of the assurance that most of the things he says will just naturally be understood by the recipient the way he expects or intends.

This phenomenon is also present in other communications encounters whenever a person is obliged to leave the familiar confines of his own particular stratum in society and talk to someone at a different level--particularly someone perceived of as being at a higher level. A young officer, for example, may have no difficulty in discussing military matters with his contemporaries. On the other hand, he might find himself ill-at-ease talking to a much higher ranking officer. Some of the words and expressions which were the common coin of the realm among the lieutenants would not, he would rapidly conclude, mean much to the senior officers. Some of the standard terms the seniors might use--clearly defined in the JCS dictionary--would be strange and unfamiliar to him.

Since words are not things, however, but only the symbols for things, communication difficulties can generally be overcome by finding the thing referred to without becoming too concerned about what words it takes to get the idea across. People who need to communicate can work it out if they make a sincere effort.

The foregoing discussion of communications theory, which is but the briefest distillation of the ideas of S.I. Hayakawa, Stuart Chase, Dwight Bolinger and other experts in linguistic theory, underscores the fact that language and communication, though a natural thing, is a complex matter. The fact that people now intermingle in society who do not come from the same closely knit social or community groups, that they don't share common attitudes toward most things they encounter, that they have not experienced things in the same way, and in many cases are not really speaking the same language, becomes important. It becomes especially important to military officers who must take the diverse products of a multi-cultural society, and generation gaps or ethnic differences notwithstanding, must get the ships underway, fly the planes, or blend their diverse group of men into a well-trained, harmonious, and smoothly efficient battalion.

The degree to which the United States is a multi-cultural society, even a half century after the last of the

great waves of immigrants, and a quarter of a century after the post-World War II group of displaced persons, cannot be easily overlooked. One need simply note that in New York City, there is a requirement in the advanced grades of the school system to improve the English language capability of the Puerto Rican youth. There is a Chinese-speaking minority of considerable size in both New York and California. Massachusetts has substantial French- and Portuguese-speaking minorities. Pennsylvania and Ohio have groups of Amish people who have remained culturally unassimilated, by choice, for a hundred and fifty years. It is easy to recognize the cultural and linguistic minorities who retain old world languages or ways. It is more difficult to recognize a culture which has evolved in the United States and did not spring from some foreign model. Such is the case with black culture.

Black Americans, more than any other minority, have cultural and linguistic differences which have gone largely unrecognized by people in the mainstream. It is trite to observe that blacks have experienced America a little differently from other minorities. But the trite observation has great importance in relation to the point that the way each person understands and interprets what is communicated to him depends entirely on the information and attitudes which his experience has ingrained on his mind. In some

respects, it may be persuasively argued that blacks do not even speak the same language as white Americans do.

Perhaps you will resist this point and argue that most of the blacks, maybe all the blacks, you have encountered spoke English. They may have had an attitude problem, but it certainly was not a language problem. But does the American black speak English? Well, as Sanford and Son might put it, "He do, but he don't." There is a distinct black dialect in English which educators recognize as a well-developed social dialect, which is a dialect which extends laterally throughout a given social class of society without much regard for region as opposed to regional dialects of the sort which we all recognize--the Boston accent, the down-east Maine accent, and the Tidewater accent. Of course, as you may recollect from personal experience with regional dialects, not only are words pronounced differently, but also words are used differently. For example, you carry milk in a pail in Vermont, but the same utensil in Virginia is likely to be called a bucket. In the mountains of Western Carolina, a moonshiner might refer to a government agent as a gauger--a word meaning nothing to you or me. Or a word might have the same dictionary meaning from dialect-to-dialect, but its connotation would be different. Yankee, for example, is defined as a nickname for a native of New England, or by extension, of the northern

part of the United States. But to be called a real Yankee in Newport, Rhode Island, is to have arrived, whereas to be called a real Yankee in Charleston, South Carolina, perhaps means something altogether different. Furthermore, a person of Oriental extraction could be born and raised in Boston, and educated in New England schools, but it is unlikely that either a New Englander or a Southerner would call him a Yankee, even though the dictionary's description had been met.

Blacks have a dialect of their own which is as well-developed as any regional dialect in America. Therefore, they pronounce some words in peculiar ways, if judged by the pronunciation standards of other dialects. Some words take on specialized meanings in black dialect. Some words in black dialect are original. Furthermore, to the untrained ear, there is an element of ambiguity in many expressions used by speakers of black dialect. The meaning relates much more to the context of the situation and the inflection or intonation with which the words are uttered than upon the lexical meaning of the word. This is perhaps illustrated by the expression "F'get you," which David E. Frederick encountered when teaching young black schoolchildren. Roughly the equivalent of forget you, it had many shades of meaning in black dialect, ranging roughly from "get out of here, stupid," through "you're wrong," to an affectionate sort of

banter meaning essentially "aw, go on." (Frederick, 18).

Information about black dialect may be obtained from educational journals, from periodic discussions in the New York Times, or from many books and articles on the subject, a number of which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this paper. The point that there is a separate and distinct black dialect which officers should recognize and consider when dealing with black personnel, however, can be rather simply made by providing a good example. The following excerpt from David Claerbaut's Black Jargon in White America is offered:

Jim: What's happenin', mellow?

Bill: You got it, brother.

Jim: Hey, man, last night after Ken split from his crib some dude ripped off his box and all his bad jams.

Bill: Anyone see the cat?

Jim: Yeah, the gray broad downstairs. Said he had a Deuce and a Quarter. Hope they bust him, man.

Bill: Right on, brother.

Jim: If Ken meets him he says he'll be thumpin' not rappin'. He ain't frontin', man.

Bill: I can dig it, Jim ain't jive time.

Jim: We'll see you at the gig, mellow.

Bill: Solid, brother. (p. 11)

Translated, the dialogue relates the fact that someone has

stolen Ken's stereo set and records from his apartment. The thief was observed to be driving a Buick Electra 225 by the white woman living downstairs from Ken. A hope that the culprit will be apprehended is expressed, but the observation is made that should Ken catch the thief himself, he intends to beat him up. The two individuals part company commenting that they will again see one another at work.

For the non-black, a sample of black dialogue is fairly hard to interpret. The words are surely English, and the sentence structure is too, but interpreted literally and lexically by the rules of Standard American English, the example of dialogue would be meaningless. Yet this is not an unreasonable example of the dialect which many black children, particularly in ghetto areas of the cities, learn first. The black dialect, not one of the mainstream dialects of American English, is likely to be the language the black child learns at his mother's knee. It will be reinforced by use with playmates, and by the announcers on the local "soul" radio station. It will be used in church and Sunday school. In some school systems, it will be the language the black child uses in the primary grades. In others, a standard dialect is used from first grade on, but many teachers find it necessary to use the black dialect as an adjunct in order to maintain rapport with the students, and to obtain feedback from the students to insure that they are,

in fact, learning. For older children in the Ghetto, the standard language may prevail in the classroom, but the black dialect holds forth in the corridors, cafeteria and locker room. It is used on the street corner, and it is used on dates. Important things are transacted in black dialect, if by important one means the satisfying personal things in life. The standard dialect, when used, is used to deal with white people often about unpleasant things or impersonal matters.

The black American is likely to be comfortable using the black dialect, and will use it when dealing with other blacks, for it is, as Gordon C. Green notes in an article on black dialect in the Journal of Negro Education, a special sort of speech which is:

. . . filled with colloquial expressions which have meaning only for Negroes, promotes the concept of the in-group and gives the colored man a sense of belonging he does not feel among whites. (14-15)

The role of the black dialect as the special property of the black man, and its characteristic of seeming ambiguity, is frequently commented on by observers of black culture.

As Roger D. Abrahams points out:

One of these hidden, in-group elements of black life to which whites have always been sensitive is Negro language and black speech behavior in general. There is a widespread and uneasy understanding that black talk has certain important characteristics which are crucially different from white norms. (p. 133)

And:

A number of anthropologists, folklorists and linguists working throughout the New World have noticed a common feature: that black talk is regarded by blacks as a means of guarding their communications so that outsiders, especially whites, cannot understand them . . . (p. 138)

Grier and Cobbs, psychiatrists discussing the treatment of mental disorders in blacks, offered a similar observation:

The jive language and the hip language, while presented in a way that whites look upon simply as quaint ethnic peculiarity, is used as a secret language to communicate hostility of blacks for whites, and great delight is taken by blacks when whites are confounded by their language. (p. 125)

The reliance of "jive" talk on ambiguity, and the sharing of context is attributed by Grier and Cobbs to the evolutionary circumstances of black language in black culture, for the language once served the special function of permitting slaves to discuss conspiracies and escapes, and to otherwise exchange information under the noses of their masters in a patois full of words of double meaning. (p. 125)

The vital need for a facility to mislead whites is, perhaps, gone from black culture in the twentieth century United States, but black culture still affords a measure of applause for those who are adept at doing so. Indeed the term "jive" has come to mean the misleading of whites through words. A more specialized form of "jiving" is

called "shucking" which is jiving "whitey" for the purpose of gaining something or avoiding something unpleasant. The fact that jiving and shucking are still regarded as laudable enterprises for a black to engage in, coupled with the fact that the effective use of black dialect as an aspect of "soul" makes the dialect a vital force in black culture rather than an anachronism left over from plantation days. Furthermore, it renews itself, as Abrahams has noted, by inventing new in-group words and expressions as quickly as the old ones are picked up by white society, and, from the black's point of view, misused and worn out. (139)

Not all blacks, of course, speak black dialect. It is more commonly spoken by young people, and by those who live in the ghettos of the larger cities, because the dialect is accepted and reinforced by cultural circumstances in the homes, churches, playgrounds, shops and street-corners of the ghetto where no particular economic or social advantage accrues to the speaker of the standard regional white dialect. Some blacks, raised in regions where there are relatively few black families, and where blacks are fully integrated into the community, do not use black dialect at all. Other blacks who work and live in essentially white communities seldom employ black dialect because they have no occasion to. Nevertheless, the point should be remembered that black dialect, for most blacks, is the native language--the

language learned from parents and others in the immediate community in which the child grew up. The standard English of white America is essentially a second language for most blacks. Accordingly, many blacks, particularly younger blacks, are not fully comfortable in the standard dialect. While they function satisfactorily in it for the most part, there is a natural tendency to revert to the black dialect when possible for what Anderson, in Studies in Multilingualism, termed "the enjoyment uses of language" (5). To quote Anderson:

For any language, the satisfactions that count relate to the enjoyment aspects of living; fantasy, romance, tall tales that amuse, the ordinary banter that goes on between friends, the subtle and biting humor that often pervades conversation, the double talk that finds expression in gossip, the fine art of indirection by which men make their wants known or by which they reject or accept the advances of others. These skills one learns to display in the use of language are his to the full when he uses his mother tongue. (3)

Thus, from the point of view of linguistic studies, at least, a tendency for young blacks to get together by themselves and joke and laugh in "jive" talk whenever possible is a reasonable expectation. Anthropologists have noted that in multilingual cultures, people of similar linguistic backgrounds tend to segregate themselves to relax, joke, converse, and reminisce in their native language or dialect.

Furthermore, even long periods of association by several cultures does not necessarily mean that one will fully assimilate the other. This is perhaps because the suggestion that an individual should abandon his native language and culture is often interpreted as a suggestion that there is something wrong with his native language and culture. By extension, then, the implication becomes that there is something wrong with the individual, his mother, his family, his neighborhood, his church, and maybe with the girl back home he plans to marry. Thus, psychologically, the individual is likely to accept learning a second language in order to reap certain tangible benefits that accrue to those who learn it, but his pride demands that he not simultaneously abandon the original language and culture, for in doing so he envisions himself as "selling out" on his heritage.

Understanding that blacks have a native dialect which differs somewhat from standard English in the United States, and that the dialect is important to the black because it has to do with home and with the pleasurable exercises of language, the military leader can view the tendency for blacks to associate in the Armed Services primarily with other blacks with less alarm. It is the normal thing, if the experience of other nations with multiple cultures is any guide to what the United States should expect from its major minorities.

Of course, the idea that a black culture exists in the United States strikes many people as an astonishing assertion. This is because black culture parallels white culture in many respects. Indeed, where white cultural institutions have accepted blacks, blacks have used them. Where white institutions have rejected blacks, they have built their own. What they built often has superficial similarities to white institutions with similar purposes, but they are by no means identical in form, function or style. Black religious institutions would be a case in point.

Furthermore, black culture, like black language, has a built-in ability to take the sting out of the inherently unequal nature of the relationship between blacks and whites through most of the history of blacks in America. Folklorists suggest that the words of many Negro spirituals did more than express certain Christian sentiments. The hymn "Free at Last," as one folklorist notes, may have sounded to Old Master like a plaintive expression of the freeing of a soul from the burden of sin. To the slaves who sang it, however, it may have sounded more like the relief of a body being freed from the burdens of Old Master. (Brown, 212-213)

A similar vein of ambiguity is present in folk tales. To the white person, animal fables about Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and Brer Bear are innocent and amusing. To the blacks who invented them, however, Brer Rabbit was the Negro who

constantly used his wits to deceive the white "crackers," Brer Fox and Brer Bear. It is interesting to recall that in most of the Brer Rabbit stories, the deception is carried out mainly by talking. As noted earlier, fooling white folks by talking now goes under the heading of "jiving," or if it is done to gain something or avoid some punishment, "shucking," but the tradition obviously far outdates those words.

There are many stories and jokes in the body of black folklore and folk humor which revolve around a black trickster who achieves great success in talking his way out of trouble with the master or the sheriff. A number of these are discussed in Richard M. Dorson's American Folklore, and J. Mason Brewer's American Negro Folklore. In addition, there is among blacks, as Dorson observed, a traditional kind of joke situation which features stock situations involving the confrontation between the black man and white authority. It is difficult to say who comes out best in these stories, the black man who manages to bitterly mock white double standards, or the white, who is nonetheless in charge. This is an example of the type of joke. It is drawn from Dorson:

Unrecognized until very recently, a whole body of jests, some bitter, some mocking, some merely wry, have vented the hurt of colored Americans at the un-American treatment. These tales of protest frequently revolve about a generic character called

'Colored Man' who is discomfited and humiliated by White Man, but whose very arrogance he can sometimes turn to account. Arrested for crossing against a red light, the Mississippi Negro tells the judge, 'I saw all the white folks going on the green light, so I thought the red light was for us Colored Folks.'
(182-3)

There are two points about black culture that the folklore underscores which are important. One is that like the black dialect, the culture places a high value on the ability to out talk whites, and to deceive whites through the use of ambiguity and allegory which blacks perceive, but whites generally do not. This has provided a cultural safety valve which has allowed a great deal of black frustration to be released instead as humor.

The other point is that black culture is an oral culture. It passes its folklore along in traditional fashion from storyteller to storyteller, and it accords a place of honor to storytellers and to other persons who are handy with words. The oral nature of black culture may stem from the fact that for centuries most masters did not permit slaves to learn to read, and some states outlawed the teaching of reading to slaves. Perhaps the roots of the oral nature of black culture are even deeper, however, as Arthur L. Smith pointed out in Communications and Rhetoric in Black America:

Black Americans are essentially an oral people much like their African ancestors

who found expressive word to be the basis for society. In African society, the Alkali, or elder, who kept the history and traditions in his head was among the most revered in the community. In black American communities, the Alkali could be anyone of several persons, from the preacher to the street corner of the dozens. What is important is that orality has been preserved, and any real understanding of black history or sociology must begin with an examination of the place of language and communication in black society. (x)

The oral nature of black culture has two impacts on communications. The first stems from the fact that people who are oriented toward oral communications, according the theories of Marshall McLuhan, tend to deal with many ideas at one time, moving from one to another rapidly. This habit of thought contrasts with the method used by people who are culturally more addicted to the printed page, and tend to handle ideas one at a time, picking an item up from their "in" basket, and working on it until they are finished before taking up the next thing. Selecting the medium for getting a message across to people who are oriented toward oral communications is a challenge for leadership. It is a challenge, however, which must be met not only as an aspect of race relations, but also as an aspect of breaching the "generation gap" as well, for as a result of a childhood and adolescence somewhat dominated by the television set, most young people in the United States today are the vanguard of an oral culture also.

The second aspect of the oral nature of black culture is more troublesome. The Alkali, as Smith called him, or the "man of words," as Abrahams (136) called the same general character, uses talking as an art form. Words are used to convey information, of course, and to form attitudes, but talking is also used purely for entertainment. A common form, for example, is a sort of insult duel called "playing the dozens," which often centers on a steady banter of remarks on the victim's mother, home or girlfriend. The orchestration of expression, the modulation of the voice, the ability to use all the latest and best slang or jargon, and the ability to deliver just the right line at just the right are all part of the art form. Blacks enjoy this sort of bantering, and an accomplished "man of words" is the center of attention. Unfortunately, as Abrahams pointed out:

. . . it is often the characteristics of the orally oriented performers and their audience which most offend whites, for from the white perspective, man of words activities register as egotistical, obnoxious, self-serving and arrogant. (142)

A final element of black language and culture which has fairly recently arrived on the scene is the rhetoric of black power. While the average white can have no rational objection to the argument that black is beautiful, and the student of black history can scarcely dispute the contention of black leaders that there is little reason to suppose that

white society will suddenly change and begin to act strongly in the interest of blacks; for some reason, whites do not like to hear blacks say those things. They particularly object to hearing such things pronounced in the harsh rhetoric of black power, with its frequent references to revolution and its seeming lack of moderation.

Taken literally, the words often used in black rhetoric are violent and they are revolutionary. They are also rhetoric, however. Few blacks really regard revolution in the sense that blacks would some way take over the United States, or even part of it, as either reasonable or desirable. They do, however, recognize the attention-gaining value of the rhetoric of black power. It bothers white people to hear that kind of talk. Therefore they pay some attention to the speaker, and some attention to the root causes of the attitude that makes him speak that way. Julian Bond is a case in point. He is an elected representative in the Georgia House of Representatives, and a young, black power advocate. He was nominated as a candidate for the Vice Presidential nomination by the last Democratic National Convention. He is a highly respected and articulate representative of his race, and appeals to many white people as a black political leader who will one day take a major role in national affairs. His book, A Time to Speak, A Time to Act, however, is fairly revolutionary in tone, and full of

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Taken literally, the words often used in black rhetoric are violent and they are revolutionary. They are also rhetoric, however. Few blacks really regard revolution in the sense that blacks would some way take over the United States, or even part of it, as either reasonable or desirable. They do, however, recognize the attention-gaining value of the rhetoric of black power. It bothers white people to hear that kind of talk. Therefore they pay some attention to the speaker, and some attention to the root causes of the attitude that makes him speak that way. Julian Bond is a case in point. He is an elected representative in the Georgia House of Representatives, and a young, black power advocate. He was nominated as a candidate for the Vice Presidential nomination by the last Democratic National Convention. He is a highly respected and articulate representative of his race, and appeals to many white people as a black political leader who will one day take a major role in national affairs. His book, A Time to Speak, A Time to Act, however, is fairly revolutionary in tone, and full of

the rhetoric of black power. That, simply stated, is the kind of rhetoric which blacks expect from their leaders, and it is the kind of rhetoric which commands the frenzied attention of white society. If it were not, black leaders would not talk that way.

Young blacks in the service, of course, hear that sort of rhetoric from black leaders, and they are likely, when frustrated, to repeat the catchy rhetorical phrases about revolution, "the fire next time," and so forth. The whites who hear them, including, unfortunately, many officers, tend to take the words at face value. They forget that words can function not only as idea carriers, but also as emotion transmitters. When young blacks talk of revolution, it is best to relax and consider what has caused them to make this emotional outburst rather than becoming alarmed by mere words. Under such circumstances, the intelligent course of action is to stay calm, because communications in situations where both sides are talking while charged with emotion seldom succeed. It is impossible to capture the main intellectual points of a discussion carried on as a verbal free-for-all, and it is impossible to communicate any ideas, either, when nobody is really listening, and everybody is talking, and much of the talking is being done mostly to register emotion or simply to make noise.

The fact that black language and culture, and indeed

any other minority's language and culture, presents problems in organizational communications, which once recognized, can be coped with. The following communications considerations are suggested. Linguistics and communication theory suggests that these points can be usefully applied in leadership situations where cross-cultural communication is a factor:

1. Words mean different things in different dialects. If you were to call a white fellow a punk that would be somewhat demeaning, but to a young speaker of black dialect, to be called a punk is to be called a homosexual, and "them's fightin' words." A speaker must attempt to keep in mind what words may mean to the listener if misunderstanding is to be avoided.

2. Words are not things. They mean only what people agree to let them mean. Calling a policeman a pig or a cop or "fuzz" does not change the policeman. As Shakespeare said, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Or as children say when vexed by words, "sticks and stones will break my bones, but names can never hurt me." When words are misused, ignore the words and look for the thing they refer to. If they are emotion-transmitters, it is the things which caused the emotions to be generated, not the words, which are relevant. Calm down, and calm the situation down, and find out what the specific causes of the raw emotions were. Never use barbed words or words with

emotion-generating potential when acting in a leadership role. The use of such words simply raises the listener's ire and blocks his end of the communications channel.

3. Do not attach value judgments to circumstances which are the result of cultural differences. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants do not name male children "Jesus," Spanish families often do. Black Muslims adopt Arabic names like Mohammed. If the cultural circumstance did not suit the people of the culture, they would not have adopted it. It's their business.

4. The medium selected for communication is important. Blacks and many young whites as well, are oriented to oral communications. There is little reason to suppose that they will be reached by the typical sort of written directive favored by military organizations. The information which they must get in order to perform their duties efficiently, and the main rules and regulations they must follow, must be explained periodically, not just posted on some bulletin board.

5. The best way to get feedback which provides the leader with instant information as to whether or not his messages are being understood is to talk to people who work for him. If the leader waits for his black troops to write him a letter, he may wait a long time. The formal mode of communications is difficult for people who are more comfortable

in an informal and oral mode. Standard English of the sort used in military correspondence is, for young blacks or young Chicanos, a second language. Writing in it may be difficult.

6. Adopt the attitude that one dialect is just as good as another. Anyone who hears Henry Kissinger speaking senses that he has an accent. Harvard, however, did not make him learn to speak exactly like the majority of Americans before they hired him, and neither did the President of the United States. To discriminate against blacks because of their dialect is a subtle but pernicious form of discrimination. Most people speak the dialect their parents spoke. The general characteristics of their dialect are fixed by cultural circumstances beyond their control. There is no point in rewarding a white person who speaks the standard dialect in preference to the black who speaks in black dialect when they are equally talented. After all, neither did much to influence the way he speaks. Blacks are conscious, however, that in school and in their careers, there is strong pressure to speak like a white person, even though there is nothing about their job which suggests that any dialect of English will enhance duty performance more than any other dialect. The services have led the way in eliminating overt forms of discrimination, and could lead the way in eliminating the subtle linguistic discrimination pattern also.

7. Know your men. This is the cardinal rule of leadership, and it is the cardinal rule of communication. When people are genuinely interested in each other, there is no barrier which can prevent their communicating. If words do not mean the same thing to them, they will find other words or draw pictures. If the intended recipient of communications knows you are interested in him and eager to have him understand your message, he will help you get it across by asking questions, or simply telling you he does not understand and needs more explanation.

8. Take advantage of bi-cultural people. Most minority officers and NCO's have had substantial experience with whites. They can see things both from the point of view of minority personnel and from the point of view of the establishment. Their rapport with the younger minority personnel may be imperfect, of course, because the different age levels in minority cultures have a generation gap just as everyone else has. Nevertheless, bi-cultural people can greatly assist you in knowing your minority personnel. This does not mean dealing with young blacks or Chicanos through junior officers and NCO's of their races, however. It is the leader's role to lead his personnel, and to deal with them directly. It is his job, likewise, to learn about his people, and the bi-cultural personnel of the command are an excellent repository of information about minority concerns and

attitudes upon which the leader can draw.

9. Have reasonable race relations goals. The point of the Human Relations Program and other such efforts is to familiarize the various cultural groups in the Armed Forces with the main cultural features of the others. There is an element of pluralism in the cultural make-up of the United States which will not fade in the near future. Blacks are not going to abandon their culture, and neither are Mexican-Americans. To do so would be to accept a measure of the "you can't go home again" attitude. Minority personnel value their folkways, and personnel from the majority culture value theirs. The experiences of other countries with cultural pluralism suggest that the minorities will accept as much of the dominant culture and language as conditions of employment demand, and no more. Blacks are not going to become "just like white people," even if every aspect of segregation and discrimination is eliminated.

10. Study communication. Because a certain facility for communication comes naturally to everyone in the course of growing up, there is a tendency to overlook the fact that the ability to communicate effectively can be improved. The writings of S.I. Hayakawa and Stuart Chase are potentially more valuable to the military officer than Rommel's Infantry Attacks, for, as Benjamin Whorf, an eminent writer on linguistics, commented:

Whenever agreement or assent is arrived

at in human affairs, and whether or not mathematics or other specialized symbolisms are made a part of the procedure, this agreement is reached by linguistic processes, or else it is not reached.

As we have seen an overt knowledge of linguistic processes by which an agreement is attained is not necessary to reaching some sort of agreement, but it is certainly no bar thereto; the more complicated and difficult the matter, the more such knowledge becomes not only an aid, but a necessity. The situation may be likened to that of navigation. Every boat that sails is in the lap of planetary forces; yet a boy can pilot his small craft around a harbor without benefit of geography, astronomy, mathematics, or international politics. To the captain of an ocean liner, however, some knowledge of all these subjects is essential. (310-311)

There are experts who will dissect black language and culture, and comment on its good points, and perhaps its bad. Such value judgments are beside the point here. We must be interested in black language and culture because they are there, asserting a profound effect on the way that a substantial number of our personnel interpret communications we direct to them. These factors also govern to some extent the informal communication efforts which blacks make. Like the radio operators who must get on the same frequency if communications are to be assured, the leader must develop the ability to communicate on the proper frequency with all of his personnel. Cultural and dialect differences may

represent barriers to effective communication within the organization, but they are not insurmountable. Improved knowledge of how people communicate provides a strong tool for the leader which will permit him to communicate effectively under all conditions. Learning more about minority cultures will further assist the leader. And, of course, establishing the proper leadership environment wherein personnel are convinced that the leaders are actually interested in them will insure that communications work. If the people know their leader is interested in them, they will be interested in what he has to say, and no communication barrier, however formidable, can impede communications where both sides want it to occur, and at least one side has sufficient knowledge of communication theory to find the frequency. And needless to say, showing some interest in the black man's language and culture is certainly part of any sincere effort to show an interest in him as a person.

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