

Sociolinguistic Study of the Identity of African American Sitcom

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Abstract

Introduction and Research Problem: The study aims to illustrate the role of language in depicting and representing identity in relation to different social classes. In the African American sitcom of the study at hand, different social classes of the same black community/race are represented in the portrayal of different characters, in term of their language use as well as other behavioral aspects. However, since social classes, apart from being socially structured, are the root source of so many different stereotypes. **Materials and Methods:** A sample is taken from the African American sitcome: The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. The reserchers has watched the whole six seasons periorly. However, for the matter of the study at hand, 15 episodes are selected specifically form the twenty-five episode long first season which specifically chosen because it includes the introduction and fundamental characteristics of each characters' personality together with the role they play and the function they perform. **Summary of Results:** The portrayals of the characteristics of each character weight heavily on common stereotypes related to the social classes that characters belong to. **Conclusion and Recommendations:** Upon analyzing the behaviors of the main characters of the African American Sitcom, we come to the conclusion that, characters' portrayals match the notions of such stereotypes. Yet, through the different acts of the characters, we realized, that different misconceptions of stereotyped images were revealed to be misconceived.

Keywords: African American, Language, Identity, Social classes, Sitcom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

African American history is one of the most heart-rending histories of America. African American ancestors have been forcefully and brutally brought to America where they are legally defined as slaves and treated as property by American. Almost three centuries later and after the abolition of slavery, African Americana have been still downgraded by the law of segregation which separated black people from white people in all kind of social activities and services. Their history witnessed an eventful period of fighting for human and equal rights, overcoming and confronting the law and social order. As a result of this oppression and abuse, the concept of race has come to be of importance significance and played a vital role because it has an actual impact on the challenges and opportunities of the life of African American. Although race as a concept is socially constructed and is doubttable as a classification system, it unifies individuals of different cultural and life experience to come as defined ethnic group and membership. In correspondence to the diversity of life and cultural experience, the significance of the role played by race

in defining self-concept varies from one individual to another. Where some placed an importance sense of defining their self-identity on race, other finds it to be of less value. Thereby, what it means to be black is diverged based on how individual perceived their racial identity.

While some American anthropologists argued, that African American are deprived from their culture through slavery and others believed, they are culturally distinct (Morgan, 1994). In order to survive slavery, "black slaves succeed in creating a distinctive culture" (Boyer, *et al.*, 2018, 341). As Sellrts, *et al.*, (1998) state "traditional African culture has had to be grafted onto the cultural practices of the European/American society to form an original cultural expression".

One of the most extensive features of African American culture is their distinct linguistic variety, which is known as African American English (AAE).

This paper will examine and analyze the use of African American English as a mean of representing

and defining different racial identities among African American / black community through analyzing the language used by the main characters of the African American Sitcom: The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.2.1. The African American Sitcom, the Fresh Prince of Bel Air

The African American sitcom was originally aired on the American radio and television network, The National Broadcasting Company, NBC. The first episode was aired on September 10th, 1990 and continued to run up for six seasons of 148 episodes up till May 20th, 1996.

The sitcom is one of the most popular shows of all time. It has been almost 25 years and reruns of the show still airing and streamed through different entertainment services. Its theme song is one of the most known song and is still played and different remixes versions surface the YouTube every now and then. The show has won 14 different awards and has been nominated 26 times for several awards such as the Golden Globes and Emmy. It is also considered as the launching point of its actors' and actress' careers, most recognizably, Will Smith. (Waxman, 2015).

The series present the actor Will Smith playing the role of a fictionalized version of himself portrayed in the character of a black young teenager of a lower middle-class from Philadelphia, who happens to confront a violent encounter which has made his mom decide to send him to finish his high school education at his aunt's custody whom on the contrary, lives in a known wealthy neighborhood of Bel-Air, in Los Anglos, California. The sitcom depicts different representations of the lower and upper classes of African American community portrayed in the character of Will Smith in opposition to his aunt, her husband, and their three kids' family, especially Carlton, Will's fellow teenager cousin. These differences are apparent in the choice of the characters' language use, apparel, behaviors and etiquette. The series pick up on the different notion of what is meant to be black. Different notions of what being black is, has been portrayed in the role of different characters. The series impersonate different stereotypes of Africans Americans. These stereotypes are beat and reversed using humor and comedy.

This paper aims to analyze the characters' speeches to illustrate the vital rule of language used among the varieties of African American English and standard American English played in determining the educational and economical level of characters, as well as examining the different attitudes of African American towards their racial identity considering their complex history and cultural background.

1.2.1.1 Characters of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air

The following list includes the main characters of the African American sitcom at hand:

1. Will Smith (played by the actor Will Smith), the protagonist and the main character of the sitcom. He portrays a young high school student from Philadelphia. He is of a social lower class.
2. Philip Banks, (played by the actor James Avery). He is a lawyer, and later promoted to a judge. He is the husband of Will's Aunt and is commonly called as Uncle Phil.
3. Vivian Banks, (played by the actress Janet Hubert-Whitten). She is a University Professor and Will's aunt. She is commonly called as Aunt Viv.
4. Carlton Banks, (played by Alfonso Ribeiro). He is the son of Philip Banks and Vivian. He was raised in Bel-Air where his family lives. He is the same age as Will.
5. Hilary Banks, (played by Karyn Parsons). She is the first child of the Banks family.
6. Ashley Banks (played by Tatyana M. Ali). She is the second and youngest daughter of the Banks family.
7. Geoffrey Butler, (played by Joseph Marcell). He is a British black man who serves as the family's butler.

1.2.2. Social stratification theory

In order to analyze the language use of different social classes we need to overlook the social stratification theory. According to Saunders (2006), the term stratification "refers to the different 'layers' or strata of social groups which are thought to be arranged, one on top of the other, in various human societies" (1). The theory of social stratification refers to how social classes relate unequally and differ from one another, and how these social classes are assembled.

One of the well know approaches to the theory of social stratification is the Marxist theory that stemmed from the work of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Karl Marx. According to the Marxist (1848) view of social stratification, all societies that ever existed, from ancient Rome to Feudal Europe to the modern Capitalism, have had two continually existing classes, the bourgeoisie/capitalist and the working class. "The class which owns the means of production [which continually] grows wealthier by exploiting the labour of the [working] class" (Saunders, 2006, 6). A more modern and alternative approach to social stratification is the Weberian stratification. According to Saunders (2006), Weber views a social class as a function; "people form a class if they share roughly common life chances" (22). Weber approach consists of three distinctive principles in relation to social classes, power, prestige, and statue. Thus, for Weber, social classes are:

The upper class consists of those who live off property income and enjoy the privileges of education. The lower class, by contrast, is 'negatively privileged' on

both dimensions... In between these two classes, the middle class consists of people who have some property but little education, and people who have little property but can command high wages by virtue of their education and qualifications (Saunders, 2006, 23-24).

The Weberian three-class-system above fits to assemble the characters of the targeted characters of the study into different classes although they come from the same ethnic group or race as African American.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore the representation of identity within the African American community through their use of the variety of English language that is spoken by their community. For that purpose, the African American sitcom is chosen as a sample of analysis because it represents, through its characters, different social classes of the black community, a higher, middle, and lower social classes. We aim to investigate the language use of each character and how it relates to their identity and social class.

1.4. Research Questions

How does the use of African American English language variety correspond to the differences between individuals within the black community based on their social classes and how they perceive their racial identity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. African American History and the Concept of Racial Identity

As mentioned before, the dominant view of African American English is viewed as incompetence language due to the lack of environmental and cognitive competency of African American. After that, Labov (1972) came to disprove and counter this view through his researchers. His examination and observation of the grammatical and features of AAE in different context prove to relate AAE to American English in logical and systematic way. Therefore, it is no longer connected to cultural or cognitive deficiency and it is approved to rather be of a linguistic variety and is thereafter named, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). However, his use of the term Vernacular seems problematic since it has been corrected with use of non-standard language variety of lower/working class. Nevertheless, for Labov the term indicates the "speaker's most automatic linguistic production free of conscious interference" (Eckert, 2012, 3).

2.2. African American Attitude towards AAE

The members of the African American community, as any other community, grows and expands across different classes and geographical scale. Therefore, their attitude towards AAE differs. In the case's argument that Martin Luther King presented in adopting AAE in school, other members of the African

American community "argued ... that AAE and AE were not sufficiently different to impede comprehension of teachers or students and that the language of instruction should be AE." (Morgan, 1994, 336). As Labov (1987) suggests that, American English is used by African American to enhance their education and economic status. Yet, amongst the young African American, AAE is prominent as it is favored by the culture of hip hop and rap. In addition, the tendency of using AAE features in both informal and formal context, where the features of AAE used relying on the grammar of AE, was trending noticeably among African American.

2.3. Features of African American English

One of the features of AAE is the difference usage of lexical items, i.e., vocabularies are used differently. For example, The Verb or lexical entry *come* "is taken to be a semi-auxiliary in that it shares at least one property with auxiliary verbs: it precedes main verbs ending in *-ing*. It is referred to here as a verbal marker" (Green, 2002, 22). For Example, 'he come walking in here like he owned the damn place'. (Spears, 1982, 852). The same with the verb *stay* as in, 'she stay winning', which indicates a habitual occurrence. Another example is the use of *some* to mean very as in; 'he's some tall', 'she can cook some good'.

Other features of AAE are the grammatical characteristics which are mostly apparent in term of tenses. For instance, the use of *done* "to express perfect and had done to express past perfect." (Sidnell, 2002, 3). For example, 'he done walked, or he had done walked'. Other grammatical features include the deletion of *have* in the past perfect tense, using the past participle in the simple past tense.

According to Sindell (2002), one of the unique features of AAE is the stressed *bin*. It is a unique item that exists solely in AAE. It is meaning varies depending on the verb it accompanies. It could also come with verbal complements, 'he bin eating', or, non-verbal complements 'he bin a preacher'. *Bin* is one of the most mistaken by non-AAVE speakers as they hear it and think of it as 'has been', when as in the examples above, it does not. For addition, 'he bin a preacher' does not mean that he has been a preacher. Conversely, it indicates that he has been a preacher for a long time, and he is still now. Also, AAE speakers omit the *-s* suffix in the third person singular present tense. Consequently, the auxiliary verbs *don't* is used for both first- and second-person plural, and third person singular. The same goes with *have* instead of *has*. Another distinctive aspect of grammar in AAE is the use of *invariant be* "to indicate a habitual event or action" (Sidnell, 2002, 8), as in 'she be sick'. Other use of *be* is to indicate the future tense which is mainly occur with the deletion of the verb *will* that supposedly precedes it. Other future indicators in AAE are, *gonna*, and *finna*, for the immediate future, and *be done* for the

perfect future tense. These are very few distinctives characteristics of AAE. However, although African American English is linguistic systematic variation of American English, AAE is often mistakenly perceived as bad or ungrammatical English, or mostly as slangs. People usually think of it as an informal language or even as a street or a lower class.

2.4. AAE and Identity

According to Smitherman & Smitherman-Donaldson (1986), throughout African American history, there is the hope of escaping and returning to their homeland. Yet, as time progressed, African American starts to settle in America and antecedent dreams about their homeland become of fantasies. Consequently, they start adopting, “what Langston Hughes has termed the ‘ways of white folks’ — their religion, culture, customs, and, of course, language” (10). However, at the same time, black people are resetting this movement, as Smitherman & Smitherman-Donaldson (1986) describes, “we have the ‘push-pull’ syndrome in black America, that is, pushing toward White American culture while simultaneously pulling away from it” (10-11).

Jones & Preston (2006) conduct a study of middle and lower classes of urban northern African Americans from Lansing, Michigan [¹]. They focus on the AAE in relation to the African American identity. For them, the Smitherman’s push-pull (1986), is more evident in language. As Jones & Preston (2006) indicate in their research, they find it odd that African American language variety is viewed as a representative of the younger working class rather than the adult or middle and upper classes just because they are well educated and more exposed to the standard American English. This is in concordance with Labov (1972) point of view as he states,

“We have not encountered any nonstandard speakers who gained good control of a standard language, and still retained control of the nonstandard vernacular. Dialect differences depend upon low-level rules, which appear as minor adjustments and extensions of contextual conditions, etc” (Labov, 1972. 215).

In response to this, Jones & Preston (2006) state that there is a clear relation between language and identity even though that Labov (1972) does not implicate “such speakers as lacking in African American identity” (6). Furthermore, Jones & Preston (2006) state:

“we think that many adult and higher-status African Americans have been pulling and pushing for so long that they have maintained authentic, full-

fledged African American identities without necessarily having full competence in what might be called basilectal AAVE” (7)

In their study, Jones (2003) collected conversational data from thirty-three participants who are divided into groups based on their ages, young or old, and social classes, middle or lower. They have demonstrated that African American avoid the fronting of the vowel /a/ as in the Inland American dialect. This avoidance is due to ethnic sensitivity and identity purpose. They also examine the use of AAVE morphosyntax features and they discover that most of the working class tend to use more AAVE morphosyntax features than that of the middle class. For them, “this may reflect a pattern among many higher statuses African Americans, who retain a symbolic identity in phonology while acquiring morpho-syntactic norms that are indistinguishable from other varieties” (Jones & Preston, 2006.2).

This study demonstrates on the relation between identities, whether based on social class’s differences or merely on ethnicity, and the use of a certain language variety and linguistics features in assuring this identity. This goes in line with the topic of the study at hand. This research will furtherly explore the way that identity is represented within the black community. This present research takes into account the African American sitcom: *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, as a means of study because it is produced and directed by African Americans and it involves a main cast composed mostly of black actors.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Collection

In order to analyze the representations of black community’s social classes through language use, a sample is taken from the African American Sitcom, the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

Data is collected from the sitcom’s first season. The researcher has previously watched the whole six seasons. However, for this research, 15 selected episodes are re-watched and analyzed. These episodes are selected specifically form the twenty-five episode long first season. The first season is specifically chosen because it includes the introduction and fundamental characteristics of each characters’ personality together with the role they play and the function they perform. The episodes are downloaded and watched through the streaming services “Netflix”. Episodes scripts are taken from the ‘Springfield! Springfield!’ TV shows and movies scripts database <www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk>. After watching the episodes, scenes with importance remarks of the topic at hand are analyzed and results are interpreted and weighted accordingly.

¹ Inland Northern cities where Inland North American English dialect is spoken

3.2. DATA ANALYSIS

3.2.1. Will Attitude towards Moving to Bel-Air with His Relatives

The sitcom's opening theme song set the premise of the show. It is a rap song rapped by Will's character introducing the events that lead him to move in with his affluent relatives in Bel Air. He expresses his resentment about moving to Bel Air, which shows his negative attitude towards it, and how his mom forces him to. See below:

Got in one little fight and my mom got scared
And said "You're moving with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air"
I begged and pleaded with her day after day
But she packed my suitcase and sent me on my way
(Theme song)

Then, he raises his pre-assumptions about Bel Air's residents and set the main plot. He predominates and declares himself as the Prince of Bel-Air:

But wait, I hear they're prissy, bourgeois, and all that
Is this the type of place that they should send this cool cat?
I don't think so, I'll see when I get there
I hope they're prepared for the Prince of Bel-Air
(Theme song)

Will sets the difference between him and his relatives based on their social classes' incongruity. For this reason, he regards them less Black and rather as White. In episode 1, when he first meets his little cousin Ashley, in her school uniform, Will goes on greeting her as his 'little Scottish cousin' (Episode 1). More precisely, Will denies his cousin Carlton his identity continuously. For example:

Will: I got a poem for you, Carl. Try this one on for size.
"Roses are red Violets are blue "Jazz and I are Black,
But Carlton, what are you?" (Episode 7)

Will also metaphorically describes his cousin as an Oreo; Black on the outside white on the inside:

Carlton: "What do you say to an Oreo?"
Will: "I say, 'What's up, Carlton!'" (Episode 6)

Moreover, when Philip's attorney partner, Henry Furth, who is white, choose Carlton over Will to entrust with his car, Will starts to question if it is based color prejudice,

Carlton: Why so glum, chum?
Will: It was my idea for me to drive his car to Palm Springs.
How come he asked you to do it? This is a Black thing, isn't it? (Episode 6)

Also, when Will's childhood friend comes over to visit him, his friend seems to share the same impressions as Will:

Carlton: you're also a disadvantaged inner-city youth, I hear.

Will's Friend: Yo, man, what's with him?

Will: It's a tan. (Episode 5)

While Carlton considers other black people of lower class to be disadvantaged, Will seems to disacknowledge Blacks of higher class to be of the same community. For Will, black identity is not based on race and color solely, but rather on where they come from, and how they act, dress, and speak. Will character portrays a Philadelphian young black boy. Ellison (2019) describes Philadelphia as, "Where Blackness Transcends" and continued to state, "If we needed a Capital of Blackness, we'd make it Philadelphia" (Ellison, 2019). Therefore, Philadelphia is specifically chosen to take a huge part in building Will's character in term of his behaviors and attitude. The same goes for Carlton's character, who was brought up in one of the best neighborhoods with lavish building and environment in America, Bel Air, Los Angeles. The background of both characters played a huge part in their upbringing. As Will perceive himself different from his family because of that, his family tries to make him understand that being black for them does not interfere with where they come from and their social status but rather on who they are and the strive for success they have and will achieve. Carlton points this out for Will in the following scene,

Will: All right, but just, out of curiosity, Carlton, what color are you?

Carlton: Here we go again. Look, just because I grew up in the best neighbourhoods and pronounce the "i-n-g"s at the end of my words doesn't make me any less black than you. (Episode 23)

In this example, Carlton draw to will's attention that their difference social status does not run against their common black identity and his use of different linguistic code does not make him any less black than Will. Moreover, Carlton confronts Will on his ideas of *blackness*,

Carlton: Look, I never judged you for being the way you are,
but you always act like I don't measure up to some rule of blackness
that you carry around. (Episode 23)

In the example above, we notice the contrasting values Will and Carlton hold of what it is meant to be black.

3.2.2. Will's Use of Language

Will insists on using AAE language variety. For Will, language, including accents, represent ethnicity and background. For instance, in the first episode after Will arrives at his aunt's house, Will

firstly meets Geoffrey, his Aunt's family butler. At the beginning, he mistakenly addresses him as his uncle Phil. Yet, after Geoffrey corrects him and proceeds to introduce himself with his British accent, Will immediately imitates his British accent and adds a use of a British common phrase, "cheerio and all that rot" where 'cheerio' means 'goodbye' and 'rot' mean 'nonsense'. Will then follow his utterance with "bring the horse around" as joke.

Geoffrey: I am Geoffrey, your uncle's butler.
 Will: Okay, well, I Cheerio and all that rot. Bring the horses round,
 Would you? (Episode 1)

In this scene, Geoffrey does not introduce himself as British. Solely from his British accent, Will is able to recognize where he is from. Will reaction prove that, language use of certain linguistic features, such as accent and the use of common saying that are tied with certain society or culture, carries the person's identity, ethnicity, and history.

On the semantic level, Will choice and persistence on using specific lexical items and vocabularies, shows that he expresses his self-identity through his language. For example:

Will: Carlton, you Five-ed me, man.
 Carlton: Excuse me?
 Will: You dimed me out.
 Carlton: Pardon?
 Will: You tattled on me, all right? (Episode 14)

As the example above, Will uses the slang expressions "fived me" and "dimed me out" to confront Carlton about telling on him on his wrong action. As we notice, Will would rather clarify the meaning of the word and phrases he uses with a similar way associated with his language, before he would explain it in their language. For instance, In the scene below, Will uses the word 'stupid' to describe a pleasant experience, and after being interrupted by his uncle's 'excuse me' which indicates that he needs to watch his language, he proceeds with 'dope'. In this utterance, both 'stupid' and 'dope', although their unpleasant meanings; 'unintelligent' and 'drug':

Aunt Viv: Did you enjoy the trip?
 Will: The plane ride was stupid all over the first-class
 Uncle Phil: Excuse me?
 Will: I'm saying the plane was dope
 Uncle Phil: Excuse me?
 Will: No. Stupid, dope. No, that doesn't mean what you-
 How would he say, the flight was really neat. (Episode 1)

Will insists on using his slang language when he first describes his flight with 'stupid' and then with 'dope'. Ultimately, he complies with his uncle's demands and uses the word 'neat' instead. Considering

his uncle's back ground, Philip must have known what these words mean, yet, he refuses to acknowledge them in front of Will. However, Will's changing his words' choice reflects his awareness of the other standard variety and how it perceives to resemble well-mannered behavior. However, his persistency on using his language reflects how importance it is in shaping who he is.

Ironically, after Will is moved into his new private school, the Bel-Air academy, a disciplinary hearing for his act of vandalism. His white English teacher defends him and says,

Will's English teacher: We can't judge Will Smith by our standards.

He doesn't even speak our language.
 Where he grew up, the word "bad" means "good".
 Doesn't that say it all? (Episode 14)

Apparently, Will does not speak the same language of those around him. His different language use isolates him from everyone. Yet, he holds to it. Will 'constant use of the AAE variety, while surrounded by people who does not speak it, denotes the importance of language use in defining his self-identity, as well as his social/racial identity.

3.2.3. The Banks Family Attitudes towards Will's Language

From the beginning of Will's arrival at his aunt's house, with his different apparel style and different language use, his aunt's family attitudes are made obvious through their reactions. In the example above, uncle Phil interrupts Will's talk with 'excuse me' to get his attention to what he has just said. Will's persistence on using slang words is perceived as a sign of disrespect for his elders. This interruption expresses uncle Phil's disapproval of Will's language. Later, Uncle Phil's disapproval is shown through his dialogue with his wife about Will:

Aunt Viv: You got to love this guy, right?
 Uncle Phil: Did you see the way he was dressed?
 Aunt Viv: What's wrong with it?
 Uncle Phil: You hear that language?
 Aunt Viv: We used slang when we were kids. Do you remember our first date?
 You took one look at me and said: "That is a bad dress"
 You could've just said it was a good dress.
 Uncle Phil: I could have, if I liked it. Actually, it was a bad dress. (Episode 1)

In contrast with Phil's attitude, Will's aunt Viv seem to advocate for it. She expresses that it is the language she has used when they are younger. Although she advocates for Will's language, she does not use it herself. For Vivian, Will's language is coming from a young teenaged boy who has yet to learn and be educated.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On one hand, Will portrays young black boy. He speaks his African American language variety. He is good at basketball, listen to rap music, wears baggy shorts and vivid colored T-shirts. He has a Malcom X poster hanging on his room and he names him his hero. He is ill-mannered. He throws food in the air to catch it with his mouth and greet people with a high five instead of a hand shake. At his first formal dinner at his aunt's house with his uncle's firms' lawyers, Will purposely wears his suit inappropriately just so they do not mistake him as Carlton's brother, as his cousin anticipated. Will's image seems to build up in our mind easily. He symbolizes a common stereotype of what a young black man looks like. Yet, in the Sitcom, other perspectives of Will characters are displayed to show the other hidden truth about black people. Albeit mostly humorous, Will shows a great talent in playing classical music on the piano. He is interested in reading and learning. When given the opportunity at his new private school, Will manages to get good grades.

On the other, the African American Sitcom continues to portray the other side of black excellence. Although coming from the same background, Will's aunt's family represents the rising of the middle class. His uncle is presented as attorney and a judge. His aunt is a university professor. His cousin Carlton is a good student who engages in many extra curriculum activities. Everyone makes and chooses their life path. As Susan Borowitz, one of the co-creator and writers of the show, expressed in her interview with Time magazine in 2015, "There was a sense of this monolith of a black experience, that there was one kind of black American, and they all think alike and do the same thing. We liked the idea of challenging that" (Waxman, 2015). Moreover, characters' diversity in terms of their social class and language use, does not stop them for showing soldierly and being one family. At the end, and as they say, variety is the spice of life.

5. CONCLUSION

The various representations of the socio-cultural differences between Will and his aunt's family "help viewers to consider African American environment a multifarious community, abandoning the old image of black people built by mass media in the previous decades of the twentieth century" (Corrizzato, 2012). This difference is portrayed through characters' use of different linguistic varieties and behaviors. The concept of what blackness means varies between characters. While Will views the social economic statuses of his relatives and where they live as a lack of blackness, his relatives are trying to help him "to identify the naturalized code including integrity, respectably and ethics, recognized both by African American people and by whites" (Corrizzato, 2012). Being well-educated and having well-mannered values does not make them any less black. The sitcom

undermines the typical black stereotype and delivers so many messages throughout its scenes. The characters' portrayals and actions teach us to never judge a book by its cover. It also ensures that someone's background and where they come from should not stop or determine where they are going.

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