

# ON BLACK ENGLISH

GOLDIE L. IVORY

As I understand his ruling, Judge Joiner said that Blacks have a language, that it needn't be evaluated as "good" or "bad," but that we should respectfully recognize that it exists.

I am reminded of a friend who was born in Switzerland. When he entered school in the U.S., his teachers accepted him, respected his language, and believed in his ability to learn. This enabled him to successfully master the English language and other facets of the American culture. My friend is now quite articulate in standard English and fills many speaking engagements for churches, clubs, and national service organizations. His teachers were neither members of his ethnic group nor literate in his language and culture. Nevertheless,

they taught him and other students to master the English language—and not as a result of a court order.

Why didn't his teacher have problems teaching him? And why don't some of today's teachers have problems communicating with black children? My friend explains, "Because they *listen*—listen *real* hard. You have to care about students." His wife adds, "And they honor the other language that is different from theirs."

No, I don't believe in teaching black English in elementary or secondary schools. Yes, I agree with Robinson that teachers should care about, understand, and accept ethnically and culturally different students, including their languages. ■

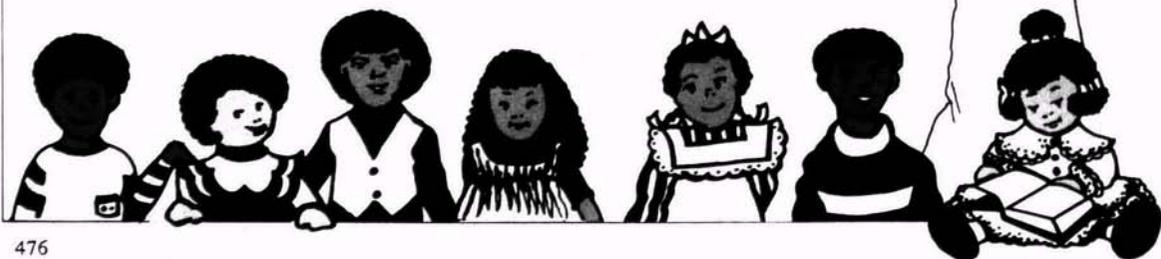
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## Ann Arbor Results Inconclusive

Officials of the Ann Arbor Public Schools say the inservice program on black dialect ordered by Judge Charles Joiner has had no discernible effect on student achievement. In a December 1980 report to Joiner on results of his controversial order to conduct mandatory inservice training for teachers, associate superintendent Lee Hanson and language arts director Tom Pietras said their course taught the features of black

vernacular English, conveyed what was known about teaching reading to children who speak it, and probed the sensitive issue of teacher attitudes.

The administrators said neither the 20 hour course nor their supplementary reading have convinced them there is a direct cause-effect relationship between teachers' knowledge of black dialect and students' learning to read. With Joiner's concurrence, the Ann Arbor schools plan to incorporate the course into their regular inservice program, but will not require teachers to take it. ■



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