

Nadia Bradley

Howard University

Reflection Paper

January 31th 2026

Reflection Paper

After reading "*If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?*" by James Baldwin, I learned that language is much more important than I thought. Before reading this essay, I believed language was just the way people talk or write. But Baldwin explains that language shows who people are, where they come from, and what they have been through. He believes Black English is a real language because it was created by Black people to survive and understand the world around them.

One important idea Baldwin talks about is how language is connected to history. Black English did not just appear for no reason. It was created during slavery, when Black people were taken from different places in Africa and forced to live together. They did not all speak the same language, so they had to make a new way to communicate. This new language helped them share ideas, protect each other, and survive very dangerous situations. Baldwin explains that sometimes Black people had to warn each other about danger in a way white people could not understand. This made me realize that Black English was created out of need, not because people were uneducated.

Baldwin also explains that language is powerful. He says people judge others by how they speak. If someone speaks differently, people may think they are not smart or not good enough. Baldwin believes this is wrong. He explains that people do not dislike Black English because of the language itself, but because they dislike the experiences and history of Black people. This part made me feel sad because it is unfair to judge someone just because of how they talk.

Another thing that stood out to me is how Baldwin says Black English has influenced American culture. Many words and phrases that people use today came from Black English, like words used in music and everyday speech. Baldwin explains that white Americans use these words but still look down on the people who created them. This made me think about how unfair it is to enjoy something but not respect where it comes from.

This essay also made me think about school and learning. Baldwin says children cannot learn from people who look down on them. If a teacher does not respect a student's language or background, the student may feel rejected or confused. I agree with this because everyone wants to feel accepted. If someone is told the way they speak is wrong, they may feel like something is wrong with them as a person.

In conclusion, James Baldwin helped me understand that Black English is a real language with deep meaning and history. It represents strength, survival, and creativity. This essay taught me that language should never be used to make people feel less important. Instead, language should be respected because it tells the story of who people are and what they have lived through.