

Black ASL: The Effects of its Discovery on the Community

Carolyn McCaskill, Ph.D.
Deaf Studies Conference
November 2, 2018

Black ASL Authors



Dr. Ceil Lucas



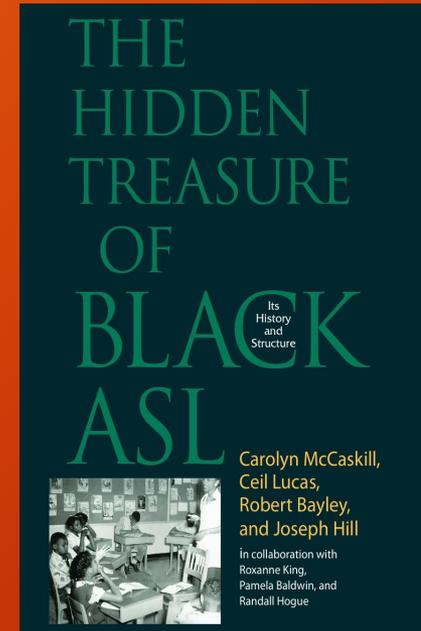
Dr. Carolyn McCaskill



Dr. Robert Bayley



Dr. Joseph Hill



Coming in 2011! **Welcome** Intro Presentations Reflections

The Black ASL Project

Text and DVD COMING SOON!
Click [HERE](#) to see the book's cover!



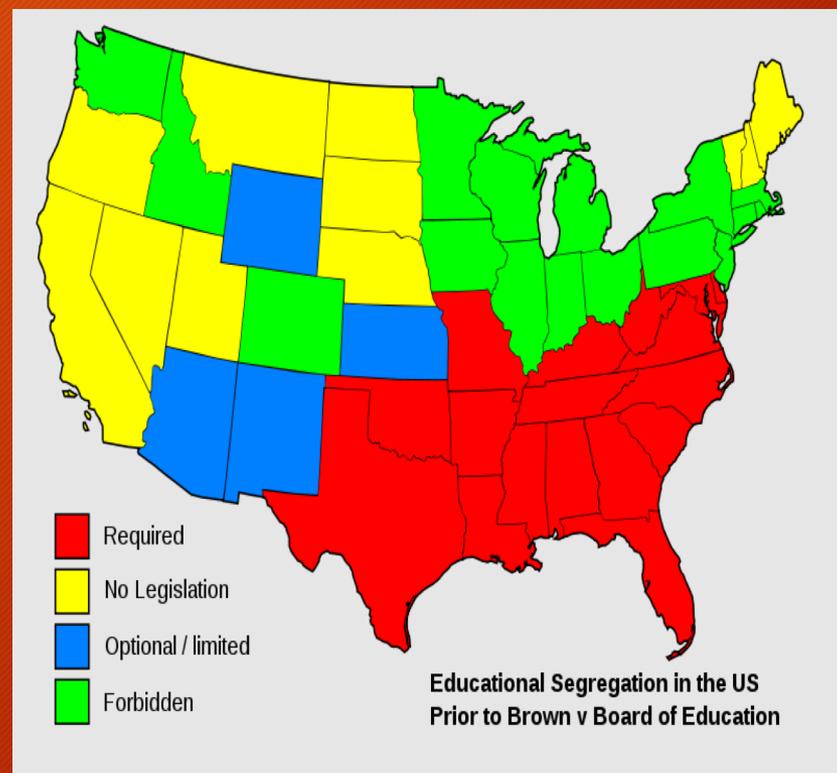
Black ASL project team members, back row from left to right: Pamela Baldwin, Joseph Hill, Roxanne Dummett, Carolyn McCaskill, front row Mary Herring Wright (interviewee) and Ceil Lucas

blackasproject.gallaudet.edu

The Black ASL Project at a Glance 2007 - 2013

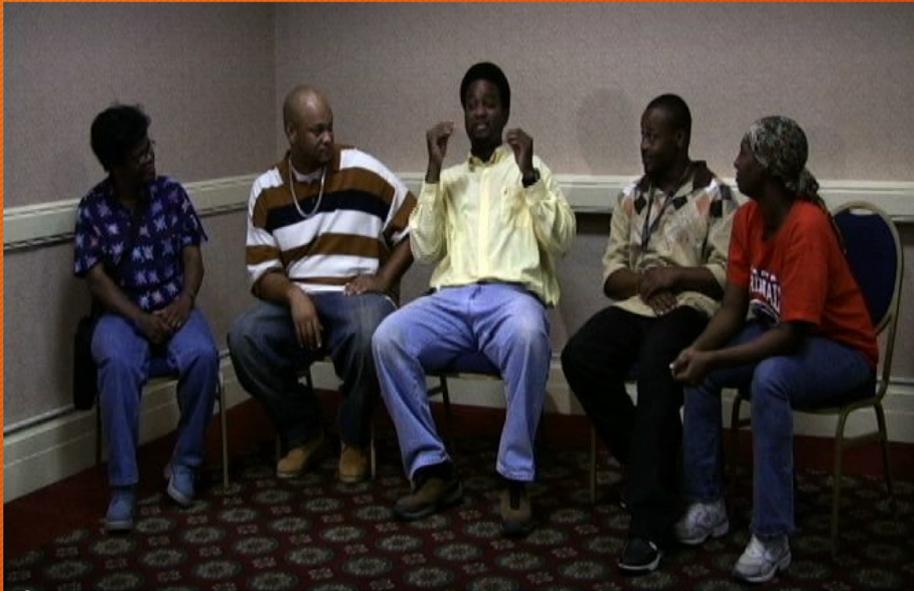
Sites visited in order of the year in which schools for Black Deaf children were founded:

1. Raleigh, North Carolina (1869)
2. Houston, Texas (1887)
3. Little Rock Arkansas (1887)
4. Talladega, Alabama (1892)
5. Hampton, Virginia (1909)
6. New Orleans, Louisiana (1938)



The Black ASL Project at a Glance

Under 35 - Virginia



Signers at each site were grouped according to age:

- “Over 55” - attended school during segregation (N = 64)
- “Under 35” (N = 32)

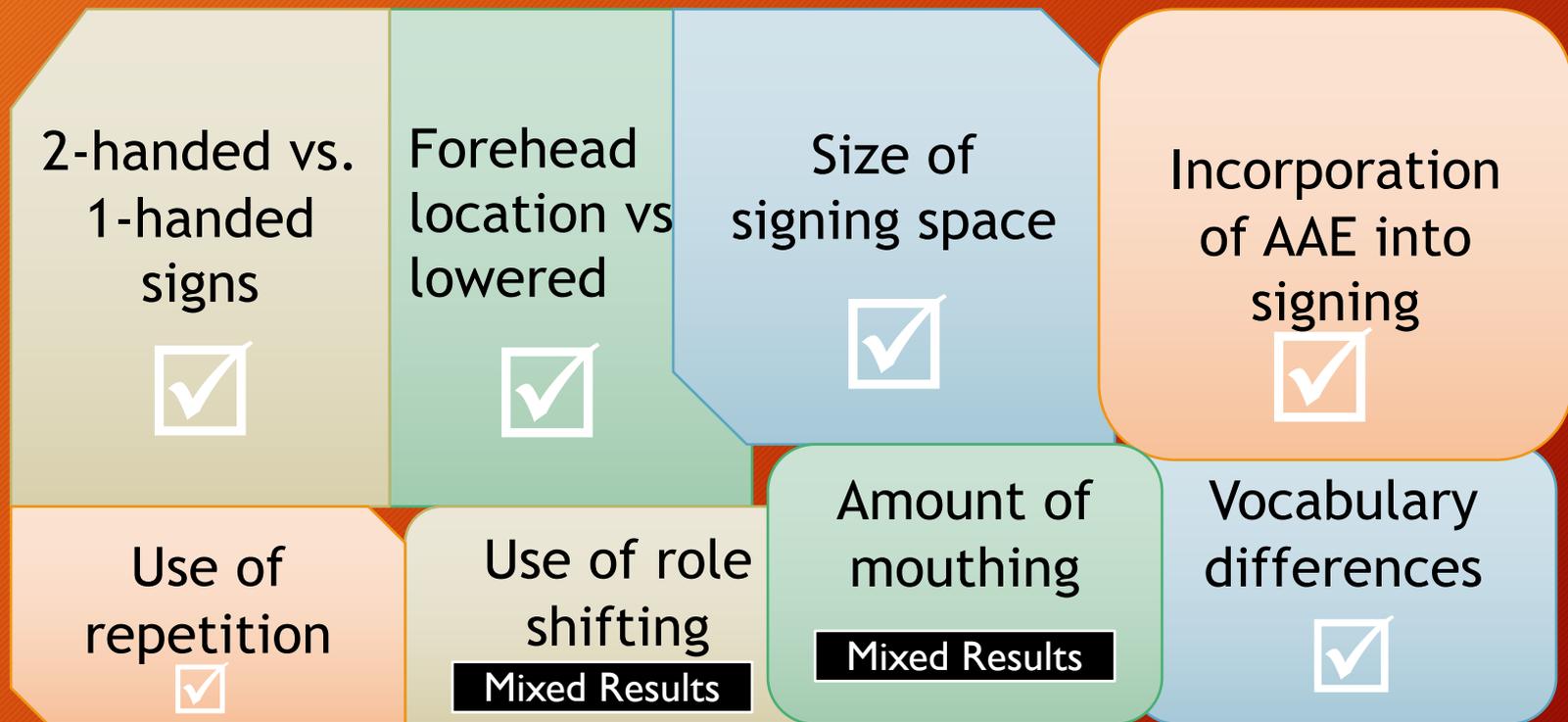
Over 55 - North Carolina



Filming occurred during the following:

- Free conversation
- Structured interviews focusing on language use and school history.

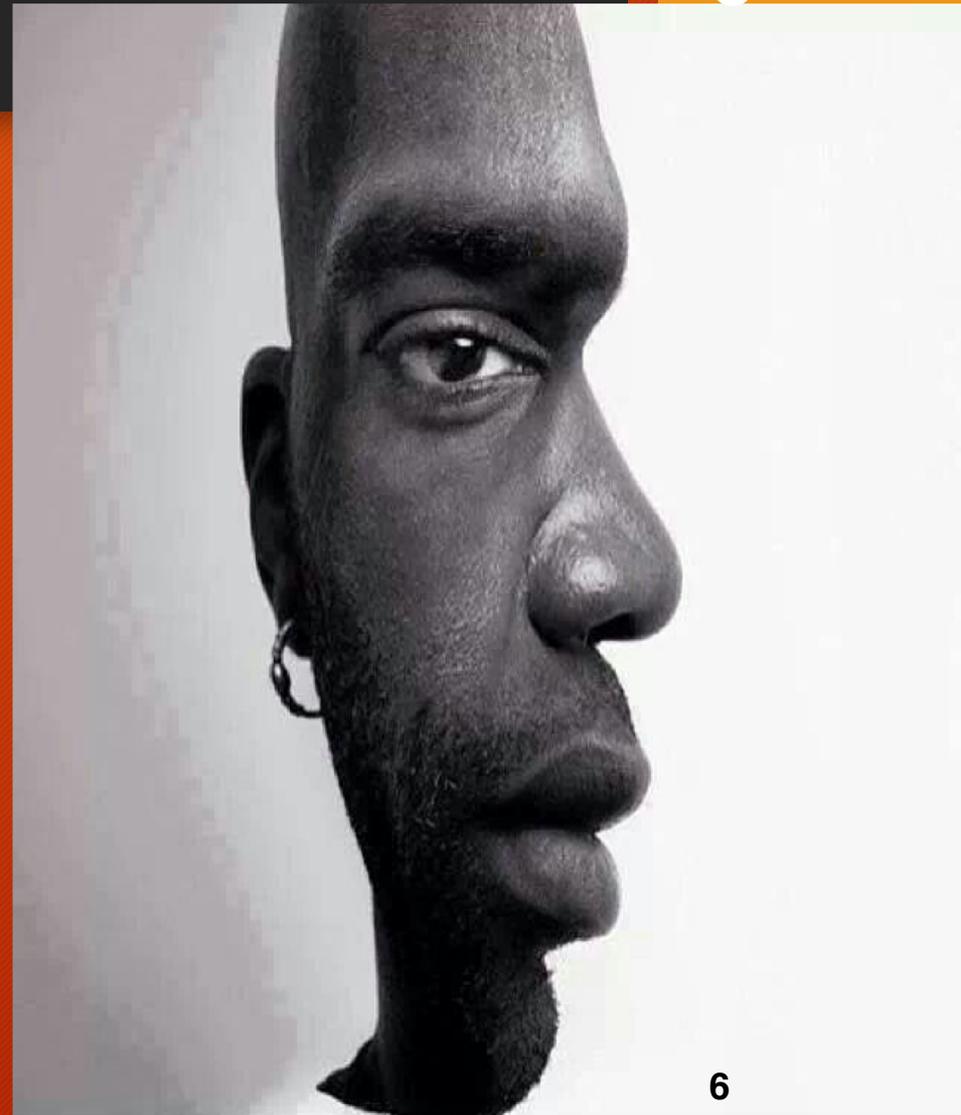
Black ASL Mosaic



PERCEPTION

6

- In the Black ASL study, we provide an overview of our findings about participants' attitudes towards their own variety.
- Our results suggest that some Black signers have negative attitudes towards their traditional variety despite the fact that, in a number of respects, Black ASL is closer to the standard taught in ASL classes and found in ASL dictionaries.
- Results also show a very positive attitude towards Black culture, as manifested in part in the incorporation of African American English lexical items into Black ASL, particularly by younger Black signers.



6

A Clip of Black ASL

Language Perceptions of Black ASL

“Under -35” Group	“Over 55” Groups
“White ASL is more advanced”	“Whites were more advanced and better”
“Black use a lot of space; White use little”	“More news and vocabulary in White”
“More facial expression, more powerful in Black ASL”	“More education”
“Different style in Black ASL”	“White is faster; black is slower like turtle”
“Attitude in Black ASL”	“Made fun of my signs so I changed to white ASL”
“White signers with sealed lips; Black signers mouth”	
“White signers are more snobby”	
“Ebonics-influenced ASL”	8

Aug 6, 2018

A Powerful Deaf School History

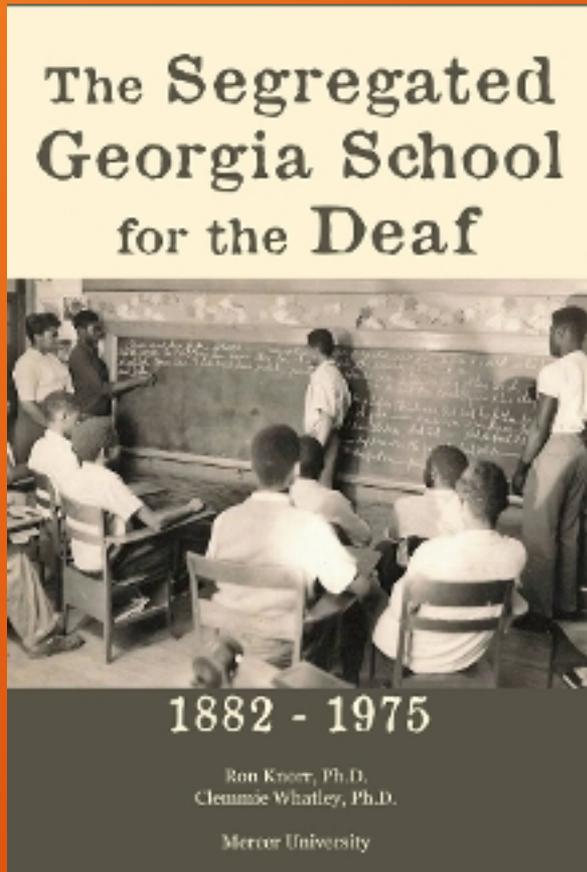


KENTUCKY SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF HONORS BLACK STUDENTS (2011)

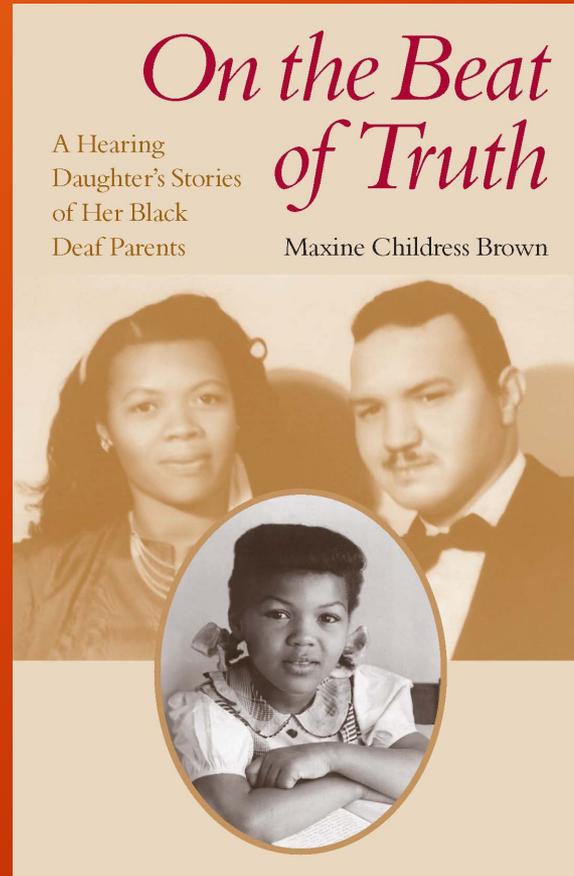
Lexington Herald Leader



Black Deaf History



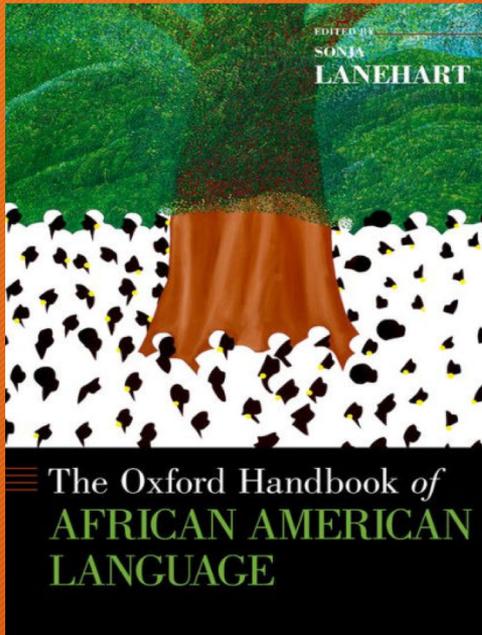
Ron Knorr and Clemmie Whatley
(2018)



Maxine Childress Brown
(2013)



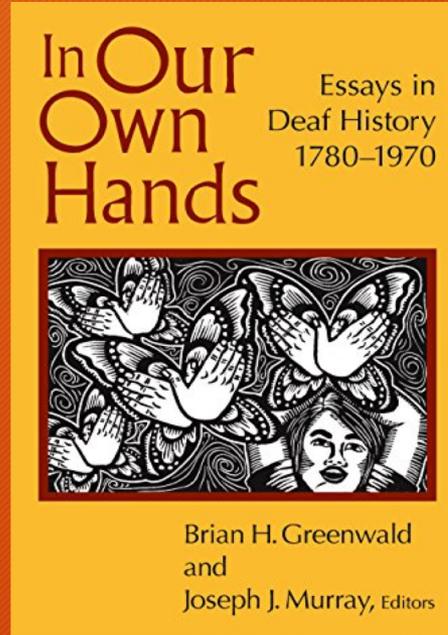
Published Articles



(2015)

Contributors:

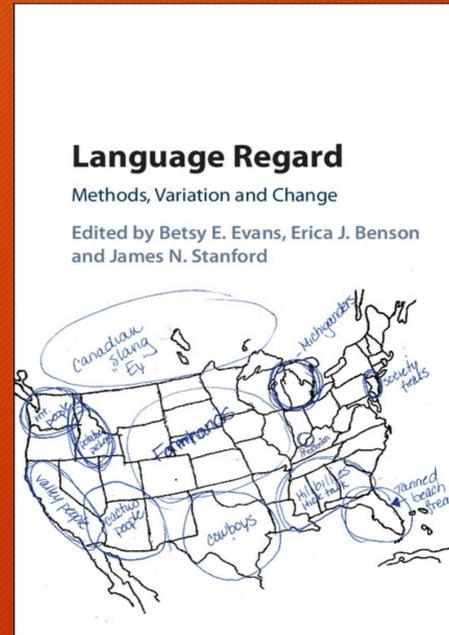
Joseph Hill
Carolyn McCaskill
Robert Bayley
Ceil Lucas



(2016)

Contributors:

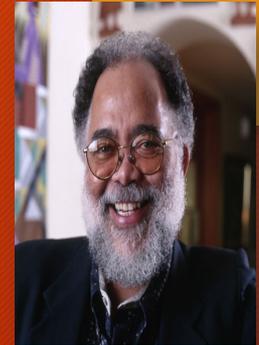
Carolyn McCaskill
Ceil Lucas
Robert Bayley
Joseph Hill



(2018)

Contributors:

Robert Bayley
Joseph Hill
Ceil Lucas
Carolyn McCaskill



The Routledge companion to the work of John R. Rickford, Routledge, New York (Forthcoming)

Contributors:

Robert Bayley
Ceil Lucas
Joseph Hill
Carolyn McCaskill

In Philly, Sign Language Has Its Own Accent

Researchers uncover a **distinct regional distinction** in American Sign Language, and seek to *preserve* it.



Dec 11, 2016 -The Atlantic.com

Washington Post & Atlanta Black Star



“Sign language that African Americans use is different from that of whites” Sept 17, 2012

“Black American Sign Language is distant from its mainstream” Sept 18, 2012

“Race Matters In Deaf Community” Sept 19, 2012

“There’s a Black Sign Language?” *The Root* Sept 18, 2012

“ASL and Black ASL: Yes, There’s a Difference” Feb 25, 2014

“Signs of segregation: The singular challenge” Feb 6, 2015

“The Hidden Treasure of Black Signs: How Segregation Led to the Unique Dialect of Deaf African-Americans” Dec 2, 2017



TALKING BLACK IN AMERICA

Documentary

- North Carolina State University Language and Life Project. <https://languageandlife.org/>

Interviews:

- June 2018
- September 2018

Slated for PBS 2019

BLACK DEAF FAMILIES

Updates

Spinoff

9 individuals from several generations of Black Deaf families

Goals

Plans for the project

Research findings

2013 NBDA

25 participants

Research assistant

Acknowledgments

The research reported here was funded by the Spencer Foundation and the National Science Foundation, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

Special thanks to the members of the African American Deaf community who generously shared with us the richness of their experience and language.

thank you!