

Not So Black and White

Author explores why Black leaders are often scrutinized for “talking white”

OLNEY, Md. - When presidential contender Sen. Barack Obama gives a speech detailing his aims for the presidency, far more than his political platform rests under public scrutiny. The biracial candidate has recently been criticized for not being “black enough” to win the presidential race. His articulate speech, deliberate mannerisms and determined nature have lead some to say he isn’t owning up to his African heritage, therefore doesn’t represent the overall culture of Black America.

Sylvia Henderson, motivational speaker and career consultant, says she succeeded in the business world as a black woman by “talking white”, or using proper grammar. She adopted a “blending in” strategy in order to advance in the male-dominated, mostly white, workforce.

In her latest book, *Why You Talk So White?*, Henderson identifies common communication behaviors that sabotage the success of the urban community, be it black or white. The book identifies behaviors that represent professionalism and demonstrate positive work ethics.

“The notion that good oratory skills are fundamentally a White trait also implies that Blacks are incapable of using good diction. It’s a common line of thought that if a Black person speaks well, then he or she is ultimately abandoning their racial group,” Henderson says. “These negative implications are false and should be abandoned, not perpetuated, by the black community.”

Growing up in Philadelphia, Henderson was often asked by her peers why she “talked white”. Henderson’s parents, both African-Americans, faced overt racism and sexism while coming of age in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. Active in the civil rights movement, they firmly believed that for a black person to survive and succeed, they must assimilate into the “white man’s world” by looking, sounding, and acting like a majority of leaders in American society.

As a source, Henderson can discuss:

- “Talking white” in politics: Why black leaders are criticized for articulate speech
- The real urban slang debate: Education of African-American children
- Top behaviors that employees unknowingly make that undermine their careers
- Why middle-class, suburban, and white teens have adopted a hip-hop culture

After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with a Masters of Business Administration, Henderson spent more than 25 years in human resource development and management positions for large corporations such as AOL, IBM and American Management Systems. Henderson is currently the Founder and CEO of Springboard Training, a business that conducts seminars and workshops promoting professionalism, work ethics and leadership. She has written several books on interpersonal communications, including *Conversations on Success* (Insight Publishing, 2004) with co-author Deepak Chopra and *Real World Human Resource Strategies that Work* (Insight Publishing, 2004).

To request a review copy of *Why You Talk So White?* or set up an interview with Henderson, please contact Amber Childres at (512) 478-2028 ext 224 or achildres@phenixpublicity.com.