



Black American Sign Language History & Impact

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ABSTRACT

Black American Sign Language, or “BASL” is a distinct and powerful language that emerged in the 20th century because of racial segregation in the United States.

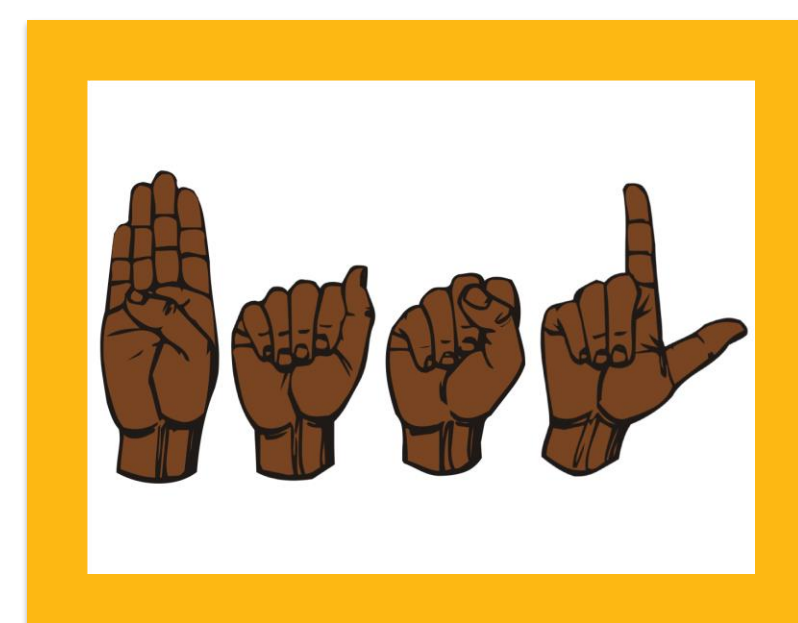
Its linguistic characteristics like, signing space, rhythm, and lexical variation, have cultural significance because they represent the resilience and survival of racism.

INTRODUCTION

BASL (Black American Sign Language) is the black deaf community's own way of signing. It's history dates back in the 20th century. They have their own unique culture with BASL and have many different distinct qualities compared to other sign languages. BASL has had such a positive impact on the black deaf community in many special ways and has given them a sense of identity.

HISTORY

BASL began developing in the 20th century. The first segregated school for Black deaf students opened in 1857, and schools were later required to integrate following the Brown v. Board of Education verdict in 1954. However, full desegregation of deaf schools did not occur until 1978. Black individuals were not allowed to join the National Association of the Deaf until 1965. In 2011, the publication of *Hidden Treasure of Black ASL* brought greater recognition and awareness to this distinct variety of American Sign Language. In 2023, after decades of denying Black Deaf students' degrees, Kendall University gave Kenneth Miller the first one.



CULTURE

BASL Cultural Significance includes:

- BASL preserves historical ASL because it uses structures that mainstream ASL no longer does
- Serves as a unique style of expression of Black Deaf Identity
- Helps created a space for shared cultural experiences
- Signifies resilience and survival of systematic racism
- Empowers Black deaf people to celebrate their culture and push for representation



IMPACT

BASL's impact includes:

- Advocating the rights of Black Deaf individuals
- Fostering unique identity in the Deaf community
- Created higher demand for culturally competent interpreters
- Developing its own distinct dialect, vocabulary, and grammar
- Increasing use of signing space and two-handed signs and emotional expression

The continued growth of BASL aided in the eventual desegregation in schools and recognition as its own separate language and not just a dialect of ASL



CONCLUSION

BASL is a special language within the black deaf community. It is something that they get to call their own within their culture. It has impacted them in different ways. It has given them a sense of identity, and it helps express themselves in ways they could not do without having BASL. It has a long history and is still used to this day by the black deaf community.



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