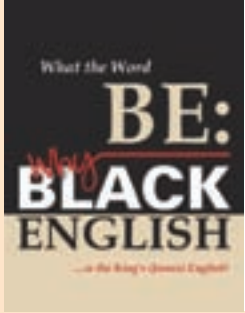


## Books

### 'What the Word Be: Why Black English Is the King's (James) English'

by Diane Proctor Reeder



Book Review by  
Kam Williams

When most people talk about the "King's English," they're referring to a very proper, aristocratic way of speaking in terms of grammar and syntax.

That style is far afield from the uniquely African-American phraseology also known as Ebonics.

In fact, the pros and cons of teaching black English has been the subject of debate in recent years, with detractors arguing that it has no place either in the classroom or in polite society. Those naysayers might rethink that position after perusing *What the Word Be: Why Black English Is the King's (James) English*.

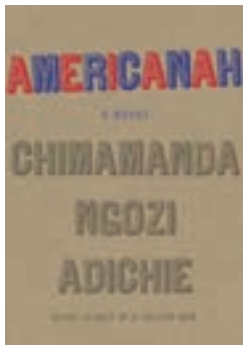
For, according to its author, Diane Proctor Reeder, the roots of Ebonics can readily be found in the King James Bible, the text employed by most slave masters to teach Africans English. To prove her point, Ms. Reeder simply quotes from scripture, such as "Surely the people is grass," which is found in Isaiah 40:7.

The playwright/editor/businesswoman came up with the idea for her opus after scouring the Good Book front to back several times and finding over 1,500 verses written in black English. Here, she carefully cites hundreds of those examples from both the Old and New Testament, including Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Job, Deuteronomy, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Who knew that the Bible is riddled with such supposed mistakes as unmarked past and present tenses, subject-verb disagreements, double subjects, bizarre uses of the verb "to be," pronoun insertions and absence of the copula? Nevertheless, to this sister, there's a method to the madness, and what academics might denigrate as nails on the blackboard ghetto parlance may now more accurately be appreciated as a God-ordained vestige of slavery worth preserving. Reeder's persuasive conclusion? "We learned how to speak the way we do because our ancestors learned to read with the King James Bible as their primary text." You be feelin' her?

### 'Americanah'

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



From the award-winning author of "Half of a Yellow Sun," a dazzling new novel: a story of love and race centered around a young man and woman from Nigeria

who face difficult choices and challenges in the countries they come to call home.

As teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their Nigeria is under military dictatorship, and people are leaving the country if they can. Ifemelu—beautiful, self-assured—departs for America to study. She suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships and friendships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze—the quiet, thoughtful son of a professor—had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

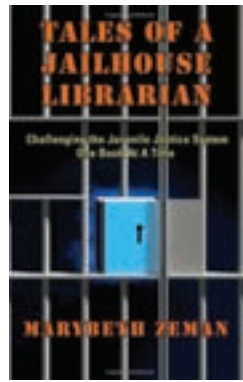
Years later, Obinze is a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, while Ifemelu has achieved success as a writer of an eye-opening blog about race in America. But when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, and she and Obinze reignite their shared passion—for their homeland and for each other—they will face the toughest decisions of their lives.

Fearless, gripping, at once darkly funny and tender, spanning three continents and numerous lives, *Americanah* is a richly told story set in today's globalized world: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's most powerful and astonishing novel yet.

### 'Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian: Challenging the Juvenile Justice System One Book at a Time'

by Marybeth Zeman

In a large suburban county jail, a rolling library book cart



connects boys with their new counselor, a veteran schoolteacher. Faced with their unquenchable thirst for reading to help ease the unremitting boredom of everyday life,

"Mrs. Z", now, "the book-lady," gives them the opportunity to share their hopes, their disappointments, their disillusionment and most of all, their anger at a system that is crushing their spirit and dreams for the future. What Frederick Douglass advised us about education rings true today—"It's easier to build strong children than repair broken men." *Tales of a Jailhouse Librarian* skillfully captures the sights, sensations and rhythms of jail life.

Zeman mixes journalism, memoir and character sketches with facts about the juvenile justice system, describes the various agencies, provides relevant statistics, and specific court cases that become so palatable they are easily digested. Never a "slog". Interesting and engaging. She makes a strong argument that these boys need education, not jail time. "We have to recognize that we have a very narrow window of opportunity left to re-direct incarcerated youth toward education and living productive lives. Jail isn't always the best solution. One million dollars invested in incarceration reduces 350

crimes; one million dollars invested in education reduces 600 crimes. It's difficult to slap the word, criminal, onto a juvenile—someone who is 16 or 17 or 18, someone who has the rest of their lives ahead of them and is just as likely as you or I were at that age to change." Not a screed or an expose. These are real stories about real kids in prison, stories so real and so raw they become our own.

### 'When I Say Jump'

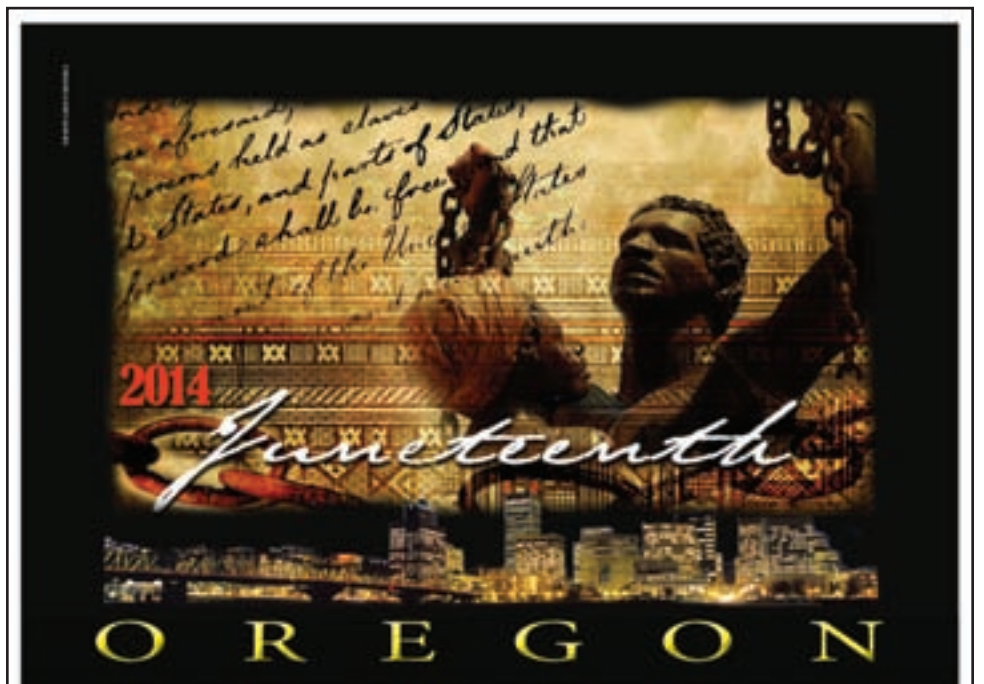
by Gibrán Tariq



After graduating at the top of her law class, Elizabeth Sellers is ready to take on and conquer the legal world, but her hopes quickly fade when none of the big Washington law firms

contact her. Discouraged, she returns home to work in a local firm where her first case might turn out to be her last.

When she is hired to take on the case of four black toddlers injured at a day care in Charlotte NC, she stumbles upon a government conspiracy to imprison one out of every four black males born in this country. Both her life and sanity are threatened, but the ultimate question for her is simple: Are black males worth saving?!



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