

Virgin Islands Creoles

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Where are the Virgin Islands?



- 1100 miles SE of Florida
- 800 miles N of Venezuela
- 35+ miles E of Puerto Rico
- 100+ miles W of SSS

(Sources: Smollett, 2006; <http://www.sailingvacations.travel/>)

Languages spoken in the USVI today

- English-only: 74.7% (80.9% STT, 68.1% STX, 81.6% STJ)
 - Presumably includes English Creole
- Spanish: 16.8% (9.8% STT, 24.2% STX, 7.8% STJ)
 - Speak English less than "very well": 6.4%
- French (and French Creole): 6.6% (7.0% STT, 6.0% STX, 8.7% STJ)
 - Speak English less than "very well": 1.7%
- Other Indo-European languages: 1.0%
- Asian and Pacific Island languages: 0.3%

(Source: <http://www.census.gov/census2000/pdf/usvifullprofile.pdf>)

Virgin Islands Creole English today

- Official designation: ISO 639-3 vic
 - Virgin Islands Creole English
 - Netherlands Antilles Creole English
- Spoken by 88,700 people
 - USVI:
 - 52,300 speakers (out of ~100,000)
 - BVI:
 - (19,700 out of ~25,000)
 - Saba, St Eustatius, St Maarten (SSS):
 - 16,700 (out of ~35,000)

(Sources: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=vic; <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>)

Early exploration and settlement

1493-1640

- 1493 Columbus lands on St Croix, encounters natives
- 1502 African slaves are first brought to Hispanola
- 1508 Ponce de León settles Puerto Rico
- 1585 Sir Francis Drake likely anchors at Virgin Gorda
- 1615 Dutch settlement in Tortola recorded by Spanish
- 1621 Dutch West India Company formed
- 1625 Dutch Virgin Islands established
- 1625 St Croix noted as being already settled by the Zeeland Dutch and a few French (Christiansted and east) and English (Frederiksted and west)
- 1625 Spanish attack Dutch settlement in Tortola, some Dutch move to Jost van Dyke
- 1628 English make unsettled claim to Tortola
- 1631 Dutch settle Virgin Gorda

1640-1665

- 1645 Dutch Governor of St Croix kills English Governor, fighting ensues and many Dutch and French Protestants leave
- 1646 Spanish destroy English colony on Tortola
- 1649 First Danish ship sent to Guinea
- 1650 Spanish attack and gain control of St Croix, French subsequently gain control
- 1652 First ship sails Copenhagen <-> West Indies
- 1653 St Croix deeded to the Knights of Malta, French still effectively ruling, French bonded laborers imported
- 1657-1660 Dutch establish post and church on St Thomas
- 1665 French West India Company controls St Croix
- 1665 English privateer attacks and occupies Tortola, noted to have captured 67 slaves and brought them to Bermuda

1665-1718

- 1665-1666 Danish West India and Guinea Company arrive on St Thomas; some English, French, and Dutch settlers join; Danes abandon settlements
- 1672 Danes return to St Thomas, find it recently abandoned by the English but still inhabited by the Dutch, and seed a colony of about 100 (including bondmen and convicts)
- 1672 Tortola and JVD come under English control
- 1673-1674 103 Africans brought to St Thomas
- 1675 Danes attempt to settle St John, rejected by English
- 1680 English control Virgin Gorda and Anegada
- 1683 Danes join English settlers on St John
- 1685 Brandenburg-Prussia (Brandenburgisch-Africanische Compagnie) settle treaty with Denmark allowing Brandenburg to settle and trade in St Thomas
- 1695 French effectively abandon St Croix
- 1718 Earliest documentation of Water Island settlement
- 1718 British relinquish St John to Danes, after dispute

Demographics: St Thomas, 1686-1691

	Blacks	Native born Whites	European born Whites	Dutch	Danish	English	French	Other
1686	?	54	81 adults	37	13	12	10	9 (5 German, 2 Swedish, 1 Flemish, 1 Portuguese)
1688	422	(included in Eur born)	317 total, 148 free adult males	66	17	31	17	17 (4 Irish, 4 Flemish, 3 German, 3 Swedish, 1 Portuguese, 1 Brazilian, 1 Scottish)
1691	555	268 free (109 Dutch, 94 Danish, 65 other)	115 free, not employed by DWI Company	36	24	19	14	22 (7 German, 7 Flemish, 2 Swedish, 1 Portuguese, 5 others)

(Sources: Hall, Slave Society in the Danish West Indies, 1992, p10; Westergaard, The Danish West Indies Under Company Rule, 1917, pp121-22)

Language influences

- African languages
 - Twi
 - Ewe
 - Many others
- European languages
 - Dutch (Zeelandic)
 - Greatest early influence
 - English (including Scottish & Irish)
 - Always large influence, especially on St Croix
 - Greatest influence after ~1800
 - Danish
 - Relatively minimal influence on the language despite the islands being Danish
 - French, Spanish, German
- Creoles

Creoles spoken in the VI

- Negerhollands (Dutch Creole)
 - Primary language on St Thomas and St John
 - Extinct
- Papiamentu
 - Small minority, influence uncertain
- Virgin Islands Creole English
 - On St Croix before St Thomas and St John
- French Creole(s)
 - From St Barts, Dominica, St Lucia, and Haiti

Dutch and French Creoles

Negerhollands and the Moravians

- 1732 German Moravian missionaries come to St Thomas
- 1733 St John Akwamu slave revolt; Danes acquire St Croix
- 1736 Earliest known mention of a Dutch creole
- ~1740 Moravians translate songs to Negerhollands
- 1752 Moravians use Church liturgy in Negerhollands
- 1754 All three islands became royal Danish colonies
- 1755-1757 Danish Lutheran Church establishes missions
- 1756-1763 Seven Years' War
- 1761 Moravians print Negerhollands Church booklet
- 1764 St Thomas proclaimed a free port
- 1765 Moravians print Negerhollands hymnbook
- 1770 *Royal Danish American* newspaper published in EN and DK
- 1770 Magens produces Negerhollands grammar
- 1774 Moravian missionary Auerbach writes letter referencing a Negro-English on St Croix
- 1777 Oldendorp publishes a history of the Moravian mission including a section on Negerhollands
- 1781 Magens' Negerhollands New Testament published
- 1784 Moravians on St Croix translate Bible to English creole

Oldendorp, 1777

"English, German, Danish, Dutch, French, Spanish, and Creole are spoken in these islands. English and High German are the languages with which one can get by everywhere. Creole is spoken by the Negroes, as well as by everyone who has to communicate with them. Therefore, the majority of the white inhabitants of the islands, particularly those who were born there, understand this language. Danes, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen each speak their respective language among themselves. Trade with the Spaniards who come to these islands makes the learning of their language necessary. Among the Germans, there are those from Upper and Lower Saxony, but all of them understand High German. The number of languages is the cause of many people mixing one with the others, as well as for speaking many language, though none well nor with purity. A knowledge of the English language is especially necessary in the towns. Since the white children are taken care of by Negro women and grow up among the Negro children, they learn first of all Creole, the Negro language. Sometimes they learn no other language properly. However, this language is spoken with more refinement by the white Creoles than by the Negroes. The English, on the other hand, do not learn Creole for the most part, and their slaves have to adjust to them in this matter. There are, therefore, large areas on St. Croix where the Negroes speak nothing but English."

"As a rule, Negroes have good memories. It is, therefore, not difficult for Bussals to learn the Creole language. And the children learn it in an almost unbelievably short time. One of my friends took a Negro boy from St. Thomas back to Germany with him, and the latter learned to speak English, Dutch, and German tolerably well in the course of the trip.... All that I have said regarding the good memory of Negroes must be taken to apply in particular to the young, for some Negroes who are already quite old when they arrive from Guinea never manage to learn the Creole language in their lifetime.... There are among the Negroes, especially among the baptized ones, various individuals who can read. In addition, some have learned how to write. Since this is for the most part an entirely non-essential skill and since their good memories suffice to compensate for the lack of such abilities in any event, their efforts are not encouraged in this area. Moreover, their masters look unkindly upon such skills, fearing their possible misuse."

(Source: Highfield & Barac, trans, A Caribbean Mission, 1987, sections 1.3.3 & 1.4.9)

1800-1815

- 1801 Achard opens first sugar beet refinery in Prussia
- 1801-1802 First British occupation (Napoleonic Wars)
- 1802-1803 Danish slave trade abolished
- 1811 Last Dutch pastor leaves the STT Dutch Church
- 1807-1815 Second British occupation

	STX whites	STX freedmen	STX slaves	STT whites	STT freedmen	STT slaves	STJ whites	STJ freedmen	STJ slaves
1789	1,952	953	22,488	492	160	4,614	167	16	2,200
1797	2,223	1,164	25,452	726	239	4,769	113	15	1,992
1815	1,840	2,480	24,330	2,122	2,284	4,393	157	271	2,306

(Source: Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 1992, p5)

An endangered language

- 1833-1834 Last Moravian & Danish Lutheran texts published
- 1834 Emancipation in the BVI
- 1838 Ordinance for 17 slave schools in English
- 1839 Moravians switch to English services
- 1844 Lutherans switch to English services
- 1848 Emancipation in the Danish West Indies, following revolt
- 1869 Addison Van Name publishes
- 1881 Erik Pontoppidan publishes
- 1887 Hugo Schuchardt publishes
- 1905 Dirk Hesseling publishes
- 1914 Hugo Schuchardt publishes
- 1926 JPB de Josselin de Jong publishes
- 1936 FG Nelson collects words and short texts
- 1970s-1980s Gilbert A. Sprauve, Anne Victoria Adams Graves, Robin Sabino, and Peter Stein publish
- 1987 Alice Stevens, last known speaker, dies

Negerhollands questions

- When and where did Negerhollands originate?
 - Late 1600s
 - Disputed origin: St Thomas, St Eustatius, West Africa (less likely)
- How accurate are the written texts?
 - Acrolect primarily written by non-native speakers, not accurate representation of black vernacular
- When did VIC replace Negerhollands?
 - St Thomas - mostly in the early 1800s; St Croix - long before
- What was the influence of Negerhollands on VIC?
 - Bilingual speakers, possible substrate
 - Little/no visible influence today, beyond a few words, as the grammar could be directly from African languages

French (STFD and NFD)

- Large number of immigrants from Saint-Barthélemy (St Barts) started arriving in St Thomas between 1865-1875
- STFD: Immigrants from west of Gustavia, St Barts spoke a dialect of standard French and moved to Frenchtown (Carenage)
- Exact population uncertain: estimated peak of 1000+ in the 1950s, 500+ in the 1970s
- NFD: Immigrants from east side of St Barts spoke a Lesser Antilles French creole and settled the Northside
- Detailed study of STFD by Highfield, 1979; reported that older speakers had highest competency in STFD, while youngest had almost none

Virgin Islands Creole English

Phonology, Morphology,
Semantics & Syntax

Phonology

- Pronunciation similar to the rest of Caribbean English
- /θ/ -> /t/ stopping ('thing' -> 'ting', 'three' -> 'tree')
- /ð/ -> /d/ stopping ('this' -> 'dis')
- Non-rhotic /r/ ('water' -> 'watah')
- /n/ -> /ŋ/ final nasal velarization ('down town' -> 'dung tung')
- /k/, /g/ -> /k^j/, /g^j/ palatalization ('car' -> 'cyar', 'girl' -> 'gyul')
- /b/ -> /b^w/ labialization ('boy' -> 'bwoy')
- Some /v/, /b/ -> /β/ and /v/ -> /w/ merger ('vex' -> 'bex')
- Initial /h/ usually voiced (contrast Jamaican/Bahamian)
- /t/, /d/ consonant cluster reduction, esp. word-final ('left hand' -> 'lef han')
- Metathesis ('ask' -> 'aks', 'film' -> 'flim')
- Epenthesis ('stupid' -> 'strupid')
- Vowel shifts and glides, some differences between islands
- More tonality than Standard English ('fáada' vs 'fàadá')

Etymology

- Vocabulary is overwhelming from English
- Words from Negerhollands, Twi (Emanuel), Ewe (Sabino):
 - *buckra, jumbie, kallaloo, pistarckle, zamba*
- Words from Taino, Arawak, Carib (same as in English)
 - *guava, iguana, hammock, hurricane, papaya*
- Words from French, French Creole
 - *lamboushay, melee, j'ouvert*
- Words from Spanish
 - *brata, coki, fraico*
- Word list
 - <http://www.yellowpigs.net/virginislands/viwordlist.pdf>
- Interesting research in Emanuel, *Surviving Africanisms in Virgin Islands English Usage*, 1970.

Pronouns

	Subj, sing	Obj, sing	Poss, sing	Subj, pl	Obj, pl	Poss, pl
1st pers.	ah, I, me, meh	me, meh	me, meh, mines, mines own, my	we, ahwe, allawe	we, ahwe, allawe	we, ahwe, allawe, we own, our, ours
2nd pers.	yo, yoh, yuh, you	yo, yoh, ya, yuh, you	yo, yoh, ya, yuh, you, yor, yours	yo, yoh, ya, yuh, you, ayo, ahyo	yo, yoh, yuh, ya you, ayo, ahyo	yo, yoh, yuh, ya, you, yor, yours
3rd pers.	e, (s) he	e, (s)he, em, um, him/her	e, (s)he, his/her, (s)he own, his/hers own	deh, dey, dem	dem	dem, dey

Copula

- Omitted
 - *"ah hungry"*
- is
 - *"I is a WAPA man"*
- wa(s)
 - *"wa loney" (2), "was vex" (17), "Tis was midnight" (19)*
 - *"wa living" (1), "wa lookin" (5)*
- bin
 - *"bin a nice jumbie" (10)*
 - *"bin hot" (2), "bin too fat" (23)*

Tense

- Present
 - As in Standard English 1st person (*"he who laugh"* (27))
- Simple past
 - Often same as present (*"Cinderella become"* (3), *"when I hear"* (8))
 - Sometimes as in Standard English (*"taght"* (3), *"went"* (22), *"lived"* (26))
- Anterior
 - bin (*"bin playin"* (19), *"bin hook"* (22))
 - had (*"had stitch up"* (8), *"had tell me"*)
 - did
- Future
 - gon, goin (*"ain gon foget"* (20), *"dey goin take me away"*)
 - go (*"Wa me go do wi dem?"*)
 - will (*"wha' deh will doh"*)

Mood and aspect

- Modality
 - Standard English (*"coulda hold" (19), "would fix"*)
- Habitual, continuous (present)
 - does, da, duh (*"women does play", "You does eat saltfish?", "it does kill"*)
- Habitual (past)
 - use(d) to, useta (*"I use to eat sardine"*)
- Completive
 - done, already (*"I done tell people already"*)
- Progressive
 - (d)a (*"now it's steak me a nyam"*)

Pluralizers

- "-s", as in Standard English ("*slipas*" (12), "*two datas*" (2), "*wheels*")
- "dem"
 - Postnominal "dem" ("*sista dem*" (7), "*frien' dem*")
 - Prenominal dem with demonstrative ("*dem damn gyal*" (8))
 - "-s/dem" combination ("*horses dem*" (14), "*chil'ren dem*", "*dem hatas*" (17))
- Unmarked
 - Unmarked with number/partitive ("*3 guava*", "*all de mango*")
 - Unmarked indefinite nouns ("*bird kyan fly widout wing*")
 - Other definite nouns unmarked rarely
- Interesting research in Sabino, Diamond, & Cockcroft, "Language Variety in the Virgin Islands: Plural markings", 2003.

Negators

- no
 - *"me no know"*
- Truncated contraction
 - *"cyan hold" (19), "caan stop", "I doan know"*
- ain
 - *"ain gon foget" (20), "Me ain know", "Mein tink so"*
- Double negative
 - *"She ain had no damn rats" (13), "she don go nowhere" (9)*

Other language features

- Genitive
 - Usually omit enclitic *"-s"* (*"gyal head" (13)*)
- Existential "there is/there are"
 - *"day had" (1), "it had" (5), "it have", "eh geh"*
- Word order of yes-no and wh questions
 - Often not inverted (*"I cou try it on?" (24), "I'm late? Wa time it is?"*)
- Serial constructions
 - *"E just gon down de road goh tie out e haus."*
 - *"Kum go eat."*
- Multi-purpose preposition "for"
 - Pertaining to or possession (*"De beel fa she"*)
 - To, in order to (*"Yoh mean foh tell meh"*)
 - Modal (*"Me fa done."*)
 - At a time, on a day (*"I have to be there for 1:00.", "De game foh Tuesday."*)
 - Idiom meaning "really, decidedly" (*"foh true"*)

Virgin Islands English Creole

Sociolinguistics

1917-1971

- 1917 transfer of the islands from Denmark to the US
- 1927 End of 10yr transition period; easy migration from PR possible
- 1931 End of US Naval rule; transferred to Department of the Interior
- 1932 US citizenship extended to many Virgin Islanders
- 1936 Organic Act
- 1950 French population on STT estimated at peak as over 1000
- 1954 Revised Organic Act
- 1956 ``Bonded aliens" from the BVI migrate for employment
- 1959 US Embargo against Cuba; US tourism increases
- ``Bonded alien" program extended to the British, French, and Netherlands West Indies
- 1962 Direct jet service from New York to St Croix
- 1966 Direct jet service from New York to St Thomas
- 1970 Temporary workers' spouses & children allowed to join them
- 1970 First elected governor
- 1971 Large-scale deportation of aliens

Migration to a U.S. territory

Birth Place	USVI	US states	Puerto Rico	Other WI
1917	76.2%	2.3%	0.6%	19.1%
1930	75.6%	2.6%	3.3%	17.3%
1940	75.1%	3.4%	8.0%	12.4%
1950	73.6%	4.1%	10.8%	11.4%
1960	63.4%	8.1%	12.1%	15.0%
1970	46.5%	12.9%	6.4%	29.2%

(Source: de Albuquerque & McElroy, "Race and Ethnicity in the USVI", 1985, p55)

Nationalities in the USVI today (2000)

USVI-born	US states	Puerto Rico & other poss.	Foreign
47.9%	14.5%	4.0%	33.2%

Of the foreign-born population:

StKitts Nevis	Dominica	Ant Bar	St Lucia	Dom Rep	BVI	Trin Tob	Ang uilla	Haiti	Jam aica	Other WI
19.5	13.6	13.3	9.5	8.8	7.4	5.9	3.0	1.4	1.0	8.9

Asia	Europe	Lat Am	North Am	Africa	Oceania
3%	2.3%	1.6%	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%

(Source: <http://www.census.gov/census2000/pdf/usvifullprofile.pdf>)

Inter-island differences

- St Thomas and St John are very similar
- St Croix is more distinct
 - car: "*cyah*" (STX) vs "*cah*" (STT)
 - special: "*speshahl*" (STX) vs "*speshuhl*" (STT)
 - born here: "*baan ya*" (STX) vs "*baan heh*" (STT)
 - over there: "*ova dey deh*" (STX) vs "*ova dey*" (STT)
- Tortola is closer to St Thomas/St John than St Croix
 - /v/ -> /w/
- Saba, St Eustatius, St Maarten ???

Inter-island differences (cont)

"Thomian 1: Ok, we are aware that Cruzian people are crazy. :D That being said, we also know they speak noticeably different from the folks on the other two Virgin Islands.

Crucian 1: You think we talk bad :laugh: Funny cause I think the same way bout ahyo. When ahyo say "Dallars" *Dollars and ova here.

Thomian 2: wha ah wan to know is why alyou crushian dem have to say dey deh, for example "gyal the bwoy ova dey deh..." St. thomas now we would say "He ova dey." tortola would say "The boi ova yonda some place, try mek he come back in two-two's..."

Tortolian 1: Which Tolian u know say dah lolololol cause I know it tain me. Dis is wha a Tolian would say "I tink he ova deh" OR "He ain ova deh mehson" OR "Gah be ova deh"

Crucian 2: I know allyo Thomians ain talk.....Ahyo ras don't know how to talk tal...wah the frigg is a "special" the sh!t name Icepop...my friend use to always say she want a special....I looked at her like wah the frig u talk bout...special. And instead of sayin bruke she say broke.....for example..this girl she didn't like instead of sayin.."i will bruke up her ras"...she will say "I will broke some part of she"...what the hell is that...they dialect so bad they can't even say my name right....instead of sayin Chrystal....she and her mother dem does say (completely change the whole name spelling) Christol...I does be wah they ass is this....but i think we speak better than thomians...

Thomian 1: But for real. Dem Cruzan people does talk bad mehson. :D You want to hear dem stretch off dem "R's" "I deh herrrrre."

Crucian 1: I know wa you talkin bout and the thomian thing I have several friends from rock and fuh deh life ah me I can't undastand why deh does talk so :laugh: But I love to hear dem.

Thomian 1: Cruzans, like Jamaicans and folks from a few other islands, place a Y after the letter C when it is followed by an A. For example: Car becomes "cyarr"

Thomian 3?: well sah all of dis bout dey languauge. Cuizan does talk bad. Wha is harse rase? Mey nephew dat chile always does talk bout harse rase. And he loves to sey ah ho yoh be and ting so."

(Source: <http://www.caribplanet.com/community/archive/index.php/t-27794.html>)

How Vlers view language

- Called "dialect", sometimes "creole" or "calypso"
- Tourists and continentals have a hard time understanding the local language and may not consider it English
- Standard English as a language of prestige, in contrast to local "broken English" or "bad English"
- Some (elite) natives look down on creole
- People on/from other islands have creoles & accents

"Creole English is seen as 'bad English' and is often associated with the poor and uneducated, therefore parents and teachers often criticize and correct children when they use Creole English rather than standard American English."

"Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of some upper-class Virgin Islanders to look with disdain on Virgin Islands' Creole, considering it the language of the uneducated masses."

"My question was 'do you remember speaking Creole at home?' His response was, 'In my house???' My mother was an educated woman."

"She said that her father had basically laid down the rule that in their house 'everyone had to speak proper English'. She continued explaining that broken English was spoken in the streets and that it was not a proper Creole."

(Sources: http://www.vinow.com/general_usvi/culture/language.php; Resource Guide, 1973-74; Personal correspondence, 1 May 2011)

How Vlers view language (cont)

- Some natives take pride in their language
- Marks oneself as an insider, not an outsider (yankee)

"It don' mek no damn sense... I tyad a people assuming that because I could speak and write formal English that somehow I gat to be from somewhere else. Wha happen? Cruzans too schupid to be able to command the english language? Das wha u tellin' me? Dat because I could talk english that I must be from someplace else?

Bona Fide, brudda man. Bahn ya, people dem bahn ya, etc. etc."

(Source: <http://cruciansinfoocus.com/2008/12/21/message-to-gov-dejongh-re-stx-administrator>)

Creole continuum

- Decreolizing / decreolized
- Alleyne -- post-creole English (USVI)
- Holm -- fairly stable diglossic relationship (BVI)
- Language is closer/further from standard English depending on setting and audience
- Sabino, Diamond, & Cockcroft, "Language Variety in the Virgin Islands: Plural markings", 2003

"[As an example, one speaker] produced the greatest number of {-dem}s when telling a folk tale [but] during the political forum, ... consistently (100%) marked nouns for plural according to the Standard English system."

(Source: Sabino, Diamond, & Cockcroft, "Language Variety in the Virgin Islands: Plural marking", 2003)

Code switching and yankin'

- Code switching and mixing is very common in speech
- Can be used stylistically in speech and writing
- yank -- "To speak imitative of stateside Americans"
- Stateside Vlers may lose or curtail their accent

"Kittitian: So!!! have you lost your accent? Hope not. I also think that it is one way that you can preserve your culture.... I have friends here in Houston who who Antiguans, Jamicans, Bajans, Kittitians, Trinis, and Virgin Islanders...and when we start...it's like a foreign language for anyone who is not from the west Indies

Kittitian/Thomian: I came to this country (New York) the first time when I was 8 and stayed for 4 years so you know what that meant - Fresh water yankee by week 2. Went home to St.Thomas at 12 and while still at that impressionable stage, I was able to pick up the local dialect in no time and to this day can speak it anytime I choose, but can also resort to my New York accent if I need to. What is funny though is that I was born in St. Thomas, but because I was raised in St.Kitts, spoke a Kittitian accent first and never spoke a St.Thomas accent.

Crucian: No I haven't lost it at all because I speak it everyday at home, but at work it's a different story.

Thomian: well definately to work when dem geh meh well ass up, the accent does come out in full force...:D buh when i am outside of work, i use my accent all the time, majority of my friends if not all of them are from the caribbean, so that is definately my comfort zone..."

(Source: <http://www.caribplanet.com/community/archive/index.php/t-36280.html>)

Language in the classroom

- Standard English as the language of the classroom
- Verbal ability is below average by national test standards
- Continental teachers have trouble understanding
- Language curriculum guidance

"One of the things that bewilders and troubles many newly arrived Continentals who come to the Virgin Islands is the difficulty they have in understanding the speech of many Islanders....

The English you hear spoken on the Virgin Islands should not be considered a poor version of standard English, just as Spanish cannot be thought of as poor Latin (the analogy is relevant). In the same way, it would not please us to have American English considered as poor British English.

Try to think of Virgin Islands' Creole (as it is sometimes called) as a legitimate language in its own right -- a language that is related horizontally to English but which vertically is the descendant of West African language forms....

In the past, some teachers have caused their students to be ashamed of the way they speak at home. To do this, and to constantly correct them, is to ensure that they will "clam up" and become virtually inarticulate. Instead, Virgin Islanders should be respected for their bilingual ability.

Your job in the classroom should be to help the students progress from Creole to reading and speaking standard English."

(Source: Resource Guide to the Culture of the U.S. Virgin Islands, 1973-1974 [draft copy])

Language in the classroom (cont)

- A few projects incorporating local language
 - Karen Ellis, *Domino*, primary school ~1978
 - Joseph Lisowski, *In the Mother Tongue*, high school ~1988
 - Robin Sterns, *Say It in Crucian*, university ~2005

"Most students seemed elated that they were able to express themselves in their native tongue. Somehow, writing in Creole was more meaningful to them than writing in Standard English.

Unfortunately, there are those who contend that we should place emphasis on students' practicing Standard English and disregard Creole because students may not have mastered Standard English. However, if students are familiar with Standard English and they also become familiar with Creole, they will be more knowledgeable in distinguishing the differences between the two. There will be clear distinctions in their minds because they will have a better understanding of both languages."

(Source, Harrigan, *In the Mother Tongue*, 1988?)

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