

VIEWERS' DISCUSSION GUIDE TO TALKING BLACK IN AMERICA

by Kelly Noel Waldorf

with

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INTRODUCTION

Talking Black in America explores the role of language in the lives of African Americans. Filmed in locations from the Caribbean and the South Carolina Sea Islands to the rural South, metropolitan areas of the North and West Coast, it examines the historical roots of African American Language (AAL), its contemporary status in society, its essential role in everyday life, and its important functions in verbal performance. The documentary is built around the comments and activities of everyday speakers and performers reflecting real world experiences, as well as the observations of linguists, historians, and educators. It showcases the historical development and changing role of language, as well as the remarkable impact AAL has had on the speech and culture of the United States and beyond. The documentary confronts the persistent stereotypes and prejudices about the speech of AAL and firmly positions it as an integral part of the cultural legacy of all Americans.



The education goals addressed in the film include (a) understanding and appreciating the sociocultural role of language in community life; (b) understanding the historical roots and orderly development of African American speech; (c) raising awareness about the systematic language patterning in African American Language, and (d) raising awareness about language prejudice and stereotypes that have often been associated with the speech of African Americans.

The documentary is organized into different chapters based on themes: Talking Black, Access, Exclusion, The Imprint of History, Migration, Skills, and Transformation. Following a section in which we define some of the key terminology used in the film and discussion, we summarize the key points in each chapter, discuss misconceptions, offer fun facts, and provide some discussion questions for viewers. We conclude the guide with brief biographies of the linguistic experts in the film and the documentary's producers.



WHERE ARE WE?



Filming took place in the following locations: Harlem and New York City, New York; Sea Islands and Charleston, South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; rural Mississippi; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Oakland and Palo Alto, California; and Nassau as well as Cat Island, The Bahamas. Sites were chosen to represent diversity in region, status, everyday activities, individual speakers, and performative contexts.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

What is linguistics?

Linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structures. There are many subfields within linguistics including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, dialectology, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, computational linguistics, historical linguistics, and applied linguistics.

What is a linguist?

A linguist is a person who studies the structure of language.

What is a dialect or language variety?

A dialect or language variety is a particular form of a language that is specific to or associated with a region or social group (e.g., Southern American English, Chicano/a English). Linguists and professional students of language use these terms as neutral labels, devoid of positive or negative connotations. This documentary looks at a continuum of language varieties that are spoken by or associated with Black communities. These language varieties are referred to primarily as African American Language (AAL) throughout this guide; a number of other labels are employed throughout the documentary, including Black English, African American English, Black Vernacular, and Ebonics. While linguists often have specific reasons for using one term over another, for the purposes of this guide and the documentary, all of these labels can be thought of as describing the range of dialects and styles that collectively constitute talking Black in America.

CHAPTER 1: TALKING BLACK (0:00-5:47)

This section introduces the concept of 'Talking Black' and some of the language's distinguishing features. It examines the difficulty of defining "talking Black" and introduces different terms proposed for referring to African American speech. It shows differences between varieties used by African American speakers but also observes a core of features that may be shared by many speakers.



KEY POINTS



What is 'Talking Black?'

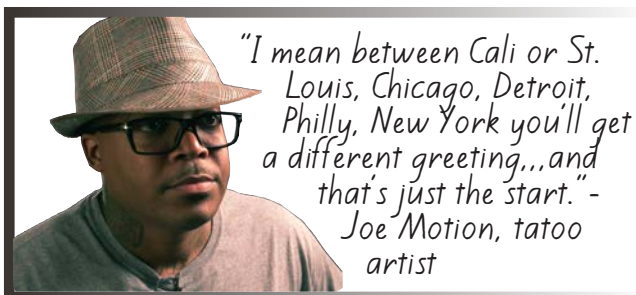
African American Language (AAL) is difficult to define because it is not a singular variety of language made up of a bounded set of linguistic features. For linguists, it is common to think about the language variety not as a single entity but as a continuum where some speakers are more vernacular and others are more standard. It is also important to acknowledge that speakers can navigate along this continuum as the social context dictates. This is sometimes called 'style shifting', 'code switching' or 'code shifting'. A comprehensive definition of African American speech would also take into account the differences in varieties across regions, classes, generations, genders, and individual speakers. These considerations make it very difficult to define, even for linguists.

Labeling language varieties

A number of terms have been used to refer to these language varieties, including *Nonstandard Negro English*, *Black English*, *Afro-American English*, *Ebonics*, *African American (Vernacular) English*, and *African American Language (AAL)*. The changing labels reflect cultural trends, sociopolitical situations, and race relations throughout U.S. history. In this guide, we tend to use African American Language (AAL) except when quoting from the film or when the context dictates a different term (such as talking about the Oakland Ebonics controversy).

Core features and differences

In the film, everyday speakers and linguists explain that there are regional differences as well as core aspects shared by many speakers of African American Language. A speaker in the rural South might use different features than those in the urban North. Speakers of differing socioeconomic classes might also use different features.



"Many people assume that Black English is one thing, that Black people speak it pretty much the same way. There are many, many types of Black English here in the United States."
-Arthur Spears, linguist

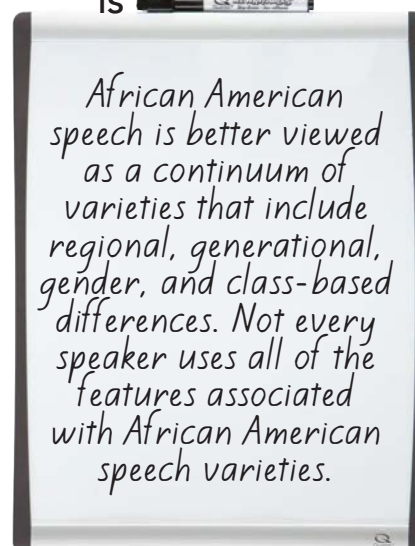


COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

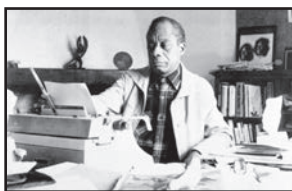
non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS

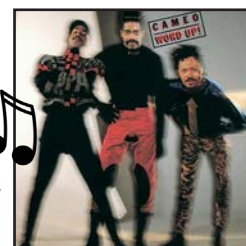


Early in the documentary we hear the voice of James Baldwin, an African American writer, political activist, and subject of the Academy-Award nominated documentary, *I Am Not Your Negro*. The recording is from an interview he did with Studs Terkel in 1961.

New York City politician Larry Scott Blackmon, is depicted in this section. His father, Larry Ernest Blackmon is the founder and frontman of the funk band, Cameo, whose famous song "Word Up!" is mentioned in the documentary.



Word up (up, up), it's the code word
No matter where you say it
you know that you'll be heard



Listen to "Word Up" by Cameo



Check out this interview with some of the members of Cameo on *The Morning Blend*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. How would you describe the way that you speak? Do you have a name or label for it? How would others define the way that you speak? *TEACHER TIP: If students are unsure where to start, consider creating a list of words on the board to describe dialects. Start with terms like "nasal" or "twangy" and try to build a vocabulary students can use.*
2. Has anyone ever commented on the way that you speak? What did they say? Was it positive, negative, or neutral? If so, how did it make you feel? How did you respond?
3. Have you ever thought about whether a stranger might be able to guess your race, ethnicity, gender, or age just from the sound of your speech?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What are some of the descriptions of talking Black given by both linguists and speakers of AAL varieties in this section?
2. Does 'talking Black' mean the same thing to everyone? What disagreements are presented around the concepts of sounding or talking Black?

POST-VIEWING

1. In the film, Keith Cross says, "They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but you know, I feel like I grew up in an environment where a person could use a few words and it felt like a thousand pictures." Do you agree? Have you ever felt that way about language? Can you describe a situation where the way something is said paints a more vivid picture than the actual words being said? **TEACHER TIP:** *It may be useful to demonstrate the importance of intonation, rhythm, and pitch through a piece of literature with dialogue such as [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) by Zora Neale Hurston or the [The Color Purple](#) by Alice Walker.*
2. What is 'Talking Black'? Why is it difficult to define? Why might some individuals consider it an insult to be told they do or do not sound Black?
3. Do you think it is possible to determine someone's ethnicity from the way they talk? Are you better at identifying some ethnicities than others? Why do you think this might be? What can you tell about a person besides their ethnicity just by listening to their voice?
4. What are some of the different terms or names used to refer to the language varieties spoken by or associated with Black communities? What label do you prefer, and why? Do you think African American speech is best thought of as a dialect or as a language?
5. What are some regional differences of AAL? Can you think of features that are distinct to the dialects of other geographical regions? What about your speech might someone from another region find distinct?
6. What is significant about the cities and regions in which this documentary takes place? Why do you think so much of the documentary was filmed in cities?

Additional Resources

Green, L. J. (2002). *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This textbook, aimed at students, describes the patterns of AAL at each level of language-sound system, word formation, sentence structures, and discourse routines. It includes discussions about the role of AAL in education, secular and religious realms, literature, and media. Each chapter is paired with exercises for students.

Wolfram, W., & Schilling, N. (2016). *American English: Dialects and variation (3rd ed.)*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

This text discusses the social and linguistic factors that have contributed to dialect variation in American English. It explains the functions of dialects and the principles of language variation while using language that is accessible to students and a general audience. It includes an extensive glossary and appendix of dialect features.

CHAPTER 2: ACCESS (5:48-9:16)

This section highlights ways in which speaking African American Language (AAL) can work to promote and prohibit access. Speakers discuss feelings of expressivity and solidarity as well as self-consciousness and marginalization.



KEY POINTS



Access

In some contexts, language can provide access and foster inclusion. AAL can build solidarity among its speakers because it signals shared aspects of their identity and marks them as in-group members. Hearing someone speak in a familiar language or dialect often produces feelings of comfort and acceptance.

Barriers

On the other hand, language can be a barrier, particularly when society stigmatizes and rejects it. This stigmatization restricts access by building barriers. These barriers can range from hurt feelings to serious material consequences related to inclusion and exclusion. Speakers in the film describe feelings of self-consciousness and instances of being mocked for the way they talk. Systemic barriers related to language include limitations on opportunities for education, jobs, and housing.

Code-switching

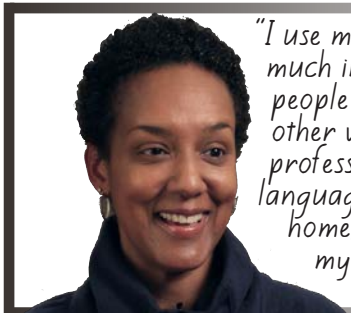
Linguists use the term 'code-switching' (also commonly called 'code-shifting') to refer to the alternating use of two or more languages or dialects by an individual. Speakers of AAL often code-switch in different settings and around different people in order to minimize negative consequences and maximize positive outcomes. In this section, we hear linguist Tracy Weldon code-switches between a mainstream dialect in her professional interview setting while using AAL in voice recordings with friends and family.



See if you can hear the code-switch by U.S. President Barack Obama in this video clip

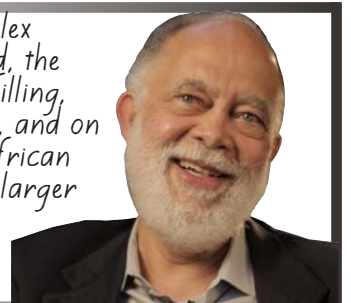


Listen to comedians Key & Peele discuss the concept of code-switching



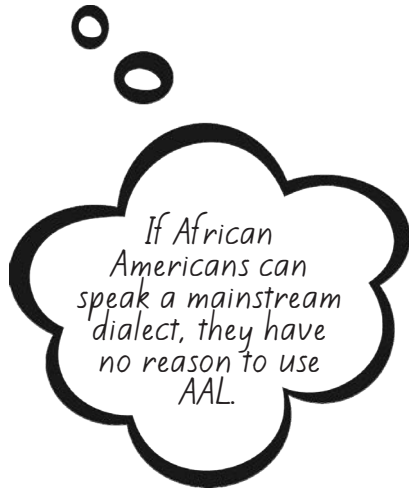
"I use mainstream ways of talking so much in my professional life that a lot of people doubt that I actually speak any other way, but when I'm outside of that professional setting it really is sort of my language of comfort, it's my language of home, it's my language of family, it's my language of friendship." -Tracy Weldon, linguist

"You have this kind of complex push which on the one hand, the language is vibrant, it's fulfilling, it's expressive, it's enjoyable, and on the other hand, you have African Americans dealing with the larger society. Getting pushback, getting misunderstanding." -John Rickford, linguist

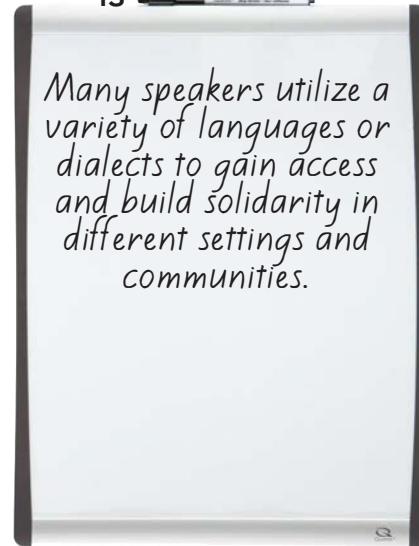


COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

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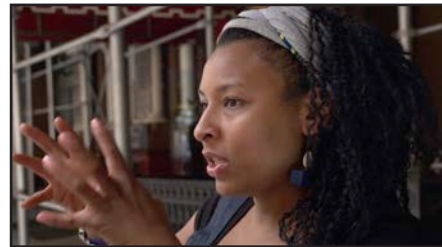


the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS

Nicky Sunshine is a stand-up comedian in New York City who has starred in and produced several comedy shows in major NYC venues like Times Square Arts Center, Broadway Comedy Club, Stand-Up NY, and New York Comedy Club.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. Have you ever felt an immediate sense of camaraderie with a person just from hearing the way that they talk? Why? Did it remind you of home? Did it make you feel like that person might have a similar background or some shared aspects of identity? Has anyone ever commented on the way that you speak? What did they say? Was it positive, negative, or neutral? If so, how did it make you feel? How did you respond?
2. Have you ever been made fun of for the way that you speak? What was said? How did it make you feel (e.g., angry, embarrassed, self-conscious)? How did you respond?
3. Do you think you speak differently around different people or in different settings? How does your speech change? What are some of the reasons that people might change the way they talk with different groups? Can you recall a time when you tried to manipulate the way you sounded for a specific purpose? For example, giving a school presentation, talking with your grandmother, working at a job, etc.

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What are some ways that language can give you access and some ways in which it can be a barrier? Listen for some of the personal experiences mentioned by Jasmine Williams, Tracey Weldon, and Nicky Sunshine.
2. In this section, linguist Tracey Weldon gives examples of how she speaks in a professional setting, with a friend, and with her mother. What differences do you hear across the three speech styles? Does she use different words or pronunciations? Or both?

POST-VIEWING

1. Tracey Weldon describes AAL as her language of comfort, home, family, and friendship. Think about the way that you talk with your family and friends. How does it bring you closer together? How would you feel if someone told you it was wrong? What if they told you that you should learn to speak a different dialect?
2. Nicky Sunshine says, "Unless you have your own company or you're a rapper or you're an athlete, with vernacular you are going to be pushed out of opportunities and marginalized." Why do you think that is? Should people be denied opportunities because of the dialect they speak? How does this relate to other issues of racial marginalization in U.S. society?
3. What are some ways that language relates to identity? Do you think that language should be included alongside other diversity qualities such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion?
4. Consider these quotes by Nicky Sunshine: 1) "I am from an African American background but I went to a predominantly White school and even when I was younger my Black family members would make fun of me and call me White girl." 2) "For economic survival, I'm going to have to do that song and dance." Do you think it's possible that some African Americans might face negative consequences whether they 'sound White' or 'sound Black'?

Additional Resources

Lippi-Green, R. L. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*, 2nd ed. London, UK: Routledge.

This captivating text explores the ways in which social attitudes and ideologies about accents are perpetuated in the media and institutionalized. It explores how people with non-standard and non-prestigious accents face discrimination and decreased access to opportunities

Young, V.A., Barrett, R., Young-Rivera, Y., & Lovejoy, K.B. (2013) *Other people's English: Code-meshing, code-switching, and African American Literacy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

This book explores the potential role of code-meshing and code-switching in the classroom as pedagogical methods which would allow African American Language to exist alongside the Standard English of the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: EXCLUSION (9:17-17:27)

This section discusses issues of language devaluation and exclusion that come from misconceptions characterizing African American Language (AAL) as a collection of errors rather than a systematic language variety. Linguists explain several rule-governed patterns of AAL and some of the controversies surrounding the language.



KEY POINTS



Rule-governed and systematic

Linguist Arthur Spears says, “All stigmatized languages usually have this false reputation of having no structure or having no grammar.” However, all language varieties are rule-governed, patterned, and systematic on multiple levels—phonological (speech sounds), lexical (vocabulary), grammatical, and pragmatic (meanings). The film describes two grammatical patterns of AAL that are often viewed as “mistakes” or “errors.”

Habitual be

In this construction, *be* means something that occurs habitually or frequently.

Examples:

John be studying Saturday nights (habitual)

John is sitting down right now

John be sitting down right now (speakers would not use a sentence like this because it is not a habitual context)

Absence of be

In places where *is* or *are* can be contracted (e.g., *she’s*, *they’re*) in general American English, these words can be absent in some varieties such as AAL.

Examples:

He nice (He is nice)

He running (He is running)

†nice (Speakers would not use a sentence like this)

†running

And to further illustrate this pattern, the sentence from the previous features, “John is sitting down right now” may also be said as “John sitting down right now.”

Common grammatical and pronunciation features (from Wolfram and Schilling 2016)

While by no means an exhaustive list, these examples represent some of the common features shared by many vernacular speakers of AAL varieties. A more extensive list can be found in Rickford 1999.

present tense, third-person -s absence

e.g. She walk (*for she walks*)

She raise (*for she raises*)

possessive -s absence

e.g. man_hat *for* man's hat
Jack_car *for* Jack's car

general plural -s absence

e.g. a lot of time *for* a lot of times
some dog *for* some dogs

Remote time stressed *béen* to mark a state or action that began a long time ago and is still relevant

e.g. You *béen* paid your dues a long time ago.
I *béen* known him a long time ago

had + verb for simple past tense in narrating past events

e.g. They had went outside and then they had messed up the yard.
Yesterday, she had fixed the bike and had rode it to school.

ain't *for* didn't

e.g. He ain't go there yesterday
He ain't do it.

reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a word beginning with a vowel

e.g. lif' up *for* lift up
bus' up *for* bust up

skr for str initial consonant clusters

e.g. skreet *for* street
skraight *for* straight

use of [f] and [v] for final th

e.g. toof *for* tooth
smoov *for* smooth

Linguistic socialization and language ideologies

Linguist Walt Wolfram states, "People have the impression that African American English is nothing more than a collection of errors because that's how they've been socialized; if it's not standard, it's wrong. So, we have this framework that all of us have been indoctrinated into that there's a right and a wrong in language." When in reality, "Language itself is always right, because there's always a systematicity, a patterning to it." People are socialized to accept many beliefs as common sense without question or explanation. These unchecked common-sense assumptions are called ideologies. Existing dominant systems and media representations reproduce the ideologies that certain language varieties are good and right while others are wrong and bad. Schools often teach that there is one correct grammar and anything else is automatically labeled as a grammar mistake or error. Television, movies, and literature often depict the good characters with standard dialects and the bad characters with non-standard dialects, perpetuating harmful language ideologies. Many people never question why certain dialects are treated this way, why certain features are labeled as 'mistakes,' who benefits from such a system, and who is disadvantaged and excluded by it.

What is standard English?

'Standard' English is difficult to define. There is not a singular standard variety. The United States has no language academy to decide what is standard. Accordingly, 'standards' are the forms promoted by academics and upheld by dominant societal groups as 'proper,' 'correct,' and 'good.' Basically, if a person's language variety does NOT have socially stigmatized features,

then it is considered 'standard.'

Privileges of standard varieties

People who speak non-stigmatized varieties enjoy a number of privileges, many of which are invisible. Speakers of standardized English varieties are often characterized as intelligent, competent, and non-violent. Their language is used as the primary medium of education and the de facto language of standardized assessments. Their language is valued within social and political institutions of power, providing greater access to opportunities and social mobility.

Devaluation of non-standard varieties

AAL is a commonly rejected and highly stigmatized language variety that has been the subject of controversial debates throughout U.S. history. Speakers of non-standard English varieties are often characterized as uneducated, lazy, and/or violent. Their language is not used as the primary medium of education. Their language is devalued within social and political institutions of power, suppressing access to opportunities and social mobility.

Linguistic discrimination

Linguistic discrimination is the unfair treatment of an individual based on her or his language use. In the film, linguist Tracey Weldon says, "A lot of times people assume that there is some linguistic basis for the stigma against a variety and they're not aware that it really is about the people." People often justify discrimination against a dialect and its speakers with the false belief that the dialect is bad English or reflective of some sort of deficiency (e.g., educational, intelligence, moral, etc.). A common theme of many stigmatized varieties is that they are spoken by marginalized groups (e.g., working-class people, racial minorities, women). Racism and classism are often hidden beneath a false linguistic justification.

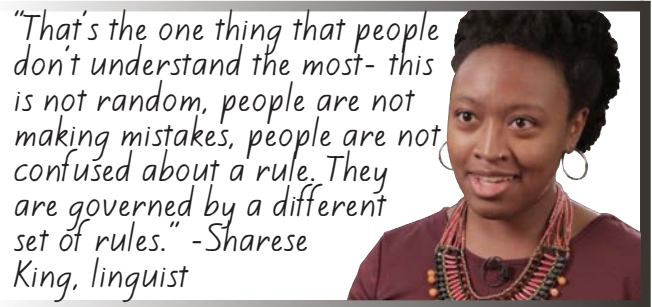
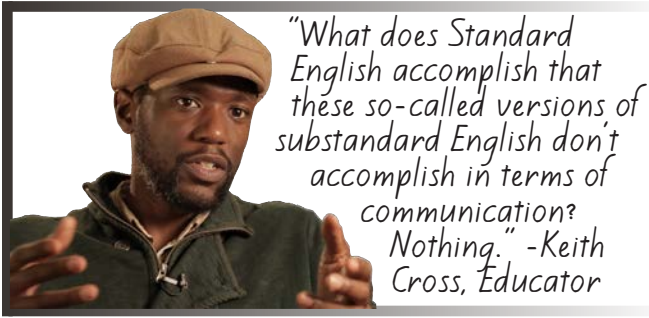


Watch a Public Service Announcement from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development depicting an example of linguistic profiling and discrimination



Oakland School Board Resolution (1996) and U.S. Senate Ebonics Hearing (1997)

In 1996, the Oakland Unified School District school board passed a resolution that acknowledged "Ebonics" (another term for AAL) as a legitimate language system and authorized some instruction in the structures of Ebonics for students who spoke it as their primary language so that they could better master the structures of academic English. The resolution generated an enormous amount of controversy around three issues (1) whether Ebonics is a language or a dialect of English (2) whether federal funds designated for bilingual education could be used for Ebonics-based programs (3) the misinterpretation by the public that classroom instruction would take place in Ebonics. The controversy revealed the breadth and intensity of public misinformation about language varieties and resulted in a special U.S. Senate Hearing on Ebonics and Education because there were issues of educational funding involved. Many linguists made statements supporting the recognition of AAL as a legitimate language system and the educational benefits of incorporating information about AAL in the classroom.

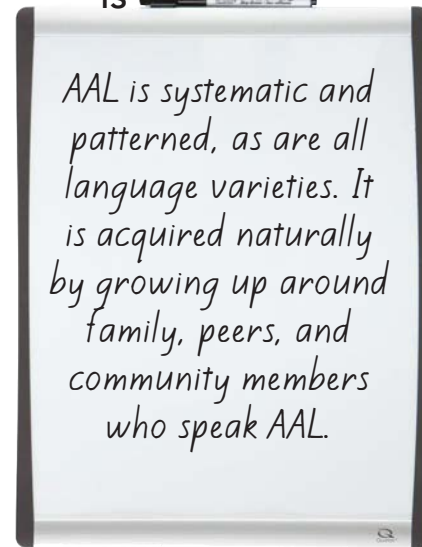


COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS

EBONY
&
phonics

The word Ebonics was coined by African American social psychologist Robert Williams in 1973 at a conference on "Cognitive and Language Development of the Black Child." It is a blend of the words ebony (black) and phonics (the science of speech sounds).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. If you heard someone say the sentence "She be studying every day" what would you think about it? Does it follow a grammatical pattern? What is the meaning of this sentence?
2. Have you ever thought someone sounded unintelligent from the way they spoke—not based on the content of their message but the way in which they said it? What were some of the qualities of their speech that made you think they were uneducated?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. Does AAL follow grammar rules? What are some grammatical patterns of AAL discussed in

the film? Even without knowing the technical label of the rule, can you describe the pattern?

POST-VIEWING

1. Some speakers grow up learning and speaking a variety of English that is considered mainstream or standard while others grow up learning a variety that is considered non-standard and carries many negative associations. Why is it important to acknowledge the language privilege experienced by people who speak a standardized variety? What advantages do native speakers of standard varieties have? In school? In the job force? In access to services or opportunities?
2. Why are certain varieties denounced while others are praised? Why do we associate language varieties with character traits like uneducated or smart? How do the characterizations of certain languages relate to the social and historical situations of the people who speak them? *TEACHER TIP: Write British English, Southern American English, and African American English on the board. Ask students what descriptions they associate with each variety. You can give them a prompting list (intelligent/posh, dumb/ignorant, thuggish/lazy) or ask them what comes to mind. Why are these associations so strong and easy to produce?*
3. Keith Cross poses the question, “What does Standard English accomplish that these so-called versions of substandard English don’t accomplish in terms of communication?” What do you think? Are the language varieties themselves keeping certain people from opportunities? Or is it something else?
4. Linguist John Rickford says, “In language, nothing is ever just random, you can just leave it out or put it in. No, there is a very strict set of rules.” Why is it important to understand that AAL and all language varieties are rule-governed and systematic?
5. Just as you can have racial or gender discrimination, you can have linguistic discrimination against people for the way they speak. What are some ways linguistic discrimination affects people? Why do you think it is so difficult to combat linguistic discrimination? How do you think people feel when they are repeatedly told their dialect is inferior?
6. How is language used to reproduce stereotypes in the media, in television, and films? Think about how certain accents and dialects contribute to stereotypes and caricatures. Can you give an example of a particular character? *TEACHER TIP: If students have trouble generating answers, ask them to describe the accents or dialects of the villains in superhero or Disney films.*
7. Do you think it would be appropriate for students to study AAL and other non-standard varieties in the classroom? In what classes? What are some possible benefits of learning the grammar of a language variety different than your own?

Additional Resources

Green, L. J. (2002). *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This textbook, aimed at students, describes the patterns of AAL at each level of language—sound system, word formation, sentence structures, and discourse routines. It includes discussions about the role of AAL in education, secular and religious realms, literature, and media. Each chapter is paired with exercises for students.

Lippi-Green, R. L. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*, (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

This captivating text explores the ways in which social attitudes and ideologies about accents are perpetuated in the media and institutionalized. It explores how people with non-standard and non-prestigious accents face discrimination and decreased access to opportunities.

Filson, N. (2017). Examining how people talk about dialects: Difference vs. deficit. Retrieved from: <http://routledge-textbooks.com/textbooks/9781138777453/chapters.php>

On the companion website to Reaser et al.'s *Dialects at School: Educating Linguistically Diverse Students*, one can find a number of activities designed for classroom use. This particular activity guides students through the process of analyzing 'difference vs. deficit' perspectives in response to YouTube vignettes about dialects and in relation to the Oakland Ebonics' Senate Subcommittee Hearing.

Original Oakland Resolution on Ebonics. Retrieved from <https://linguistlist.org/topics/ebonics/ebonics-res1.html>

A copy of the Original Oakland Resolution on Ebonics can be found here on linguistlist.org.

Perry, T. & Delpit, L. (Eds.) (1998). *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African American children*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

This collection explores the intersections of race, language, and education in the United States through scholarly papers, interviews, and personal testimonies regarding the Oakland Ebonics controversy.

Reaser, J., Adger, C. T., Wolfram, W., & Christian, D. (2017). *Dialects at school: Educating linguistically diverse students*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book highlights the major language-related issues in the educational field. It provides advice and suggestions for teaching students with non-standard dialects, teaching about dialect variation, and distinguishing between dialect differences and language disorders. Chapters also include classroom-based samples illustrating the application of these principles and activities and exercises for students.

Rickford, J.R. (1996, December). Writings on the "Ebonics" issue. Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~rickford/ebonics/>

This website provides a collection of writings on the Oakland Ebonics controversy. It includes responses by linguists, op-eds, and a list of further resources for understanding the controversy and related linguistic topics.

Rickford, J.R. (1999). *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implications*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

This book brings together sixteen essays in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) by a leading expert in the field, one who has been researching & writing for a quarter of a century.

Wolfram, W., & Schilling, N. (2016). *American English: Dialects and variation* (3rd ed.). Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

This text discusses the social and linguistic factors that have contributed to dialect variation in American English. It explains the functions of dialects and the principles of language variation while using language that is accessible to students and a general audience. It includes an extensive glossary and appendix of dialect features.

CHAPTER 4: THE IMPRINT OF HISTORY (17:28-28:30)

This section discusses the historical context, particularly the slave trade, that developed African American Language (AAL) in the United States. Various linguistic origins and influences on AAL are described.



KEY POINTS



Slave history and linguistic isolation

From the 16th to 19th centuries, approximately 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the New World via the transatlantic slave trade. 10.7 million survived and disembarked in the Americas and the Caribbean. Approximately 450,000 arrived in the United States. These Africans spoke a variety of West African languages, yet none of these languages survived the Atlantic crossing intact. As linguist John Baugh explains, this slave history produced a unique immigrant group in regards to language use due to the extreme extent of linguistic isolation. Individuals were typically isolated from other speakers of their language while on the coast of West Africa and during the Atlantic crossing. Once they arrived in the United States, they were sold and segregated into households including some larger plantations. They were prohibited from reading and writing and denied access to education for hundreds of years.

Linguistic origins and influences

As linguist Walter Edwards explains, slaves had to form languages using linguistic properties from surrounding language varieties. Varieties of AAL emerged from these linguistic contact situations with influences from West African Languages and Southern American English varieties, as well as those with roots in England and Ireland. There is some disagreement among linguists regarding the precise origins of AAL. Some believe that the roots of AAL were heavily influenced by earlier European American dialects. Others believe that AAL is a descendant of a creole (a language that emerges in situations of contact between speakers who have no common language among them). And still others contend that AAL was importantly shaped both by regional European American dialects of English and influences from West African languages.

Gullah

Gullah or Geechee is an African American creole language variety spoken in the Sea Islands and coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia. The language and culture of the Gullah-Geechee people is heavily influenced by West African languages and cultures. The linguistic isolation of speakers and density of African Americans on island communities has contributed to its longevity and resistance to assimilation.

In the film, Victoria Smalls delivers part of the Lord's prayer in Gullah:

"We Papa een heaben, leh ebrybody hona you name cause you da holy. We pray dat soon you gwine rule oba de we. Wasoneba ting you want, leh um be een dis wol, like same like e be dey

een heaben. Gii we de food dis day an ebry day. Fagib de bad ting we da do. Cause we fagib dem dat do bad to we." (Matthew 6:9-12)

Compare this to the New Revised Standard Version:

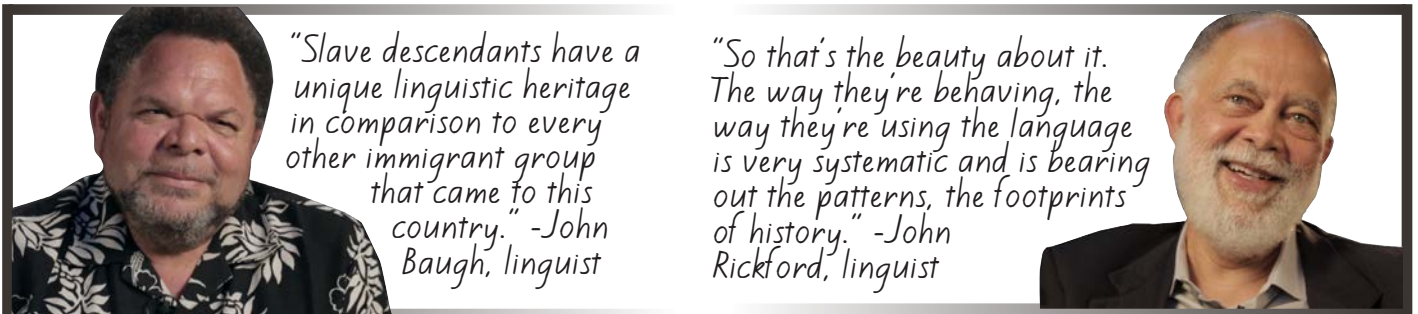
"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:9-12)

And to the New Century Version:

"Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. May your kingdom come, and what you want be done, here on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us the food we need for each day. Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us. And do not cause us to be tempted, but save us from the Evil One." (Matthew 6:9-12)

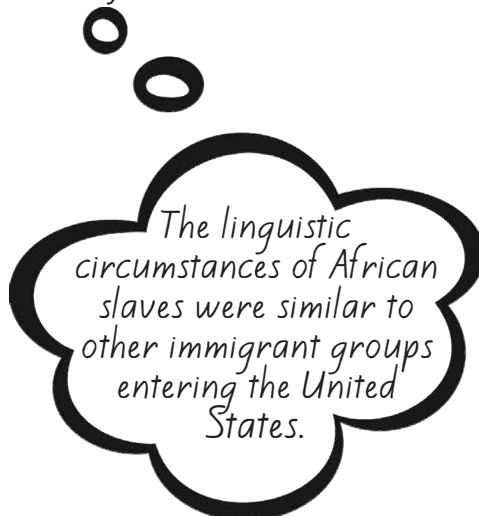
The Caribbean connection

As a result of their shared slave history and the fact that many U.S. slaves were first enslaved in the Caribbean, similarities exist between AAL varieties and Caribbean languages. For example, they share the feature 'reduction of final consonant clusters' in words like col' for cold and bes' for best discussed in the Exclusion and Language Systems section of this guide.

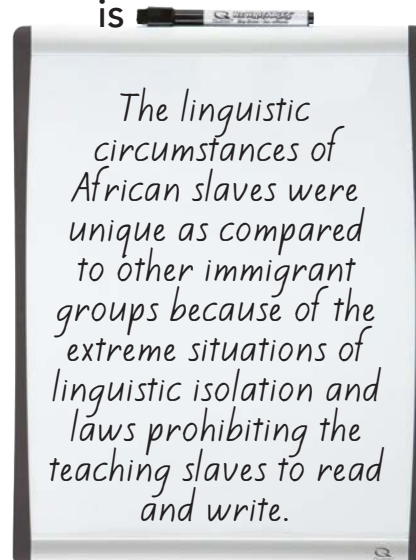


COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was raised as a Gullah speaker in coastal Georgia. Though Gullah was his first language, he avoided speaking it in public for fear of being perceived as uneducated. He has cited this as a reason for not speaking much on the Supreme Court bench.

Check out these articles on the topic:



["The Real Reason Clarence Thomas Rarely Speaks"](#)



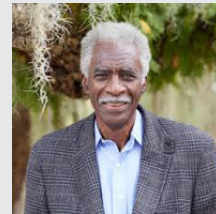
["Thomas Agonistes"](#)



From 1994 to 1998 a television show called Gullah Gullah Island aired on the Nickelodeon network.

The show, starring Natalie and Ron Daise, was inspired by Gullah Culture and by Ron Daise's home, the Sea Island, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina.

Emory Campbell, featured in the documentary, is a community leader among the Gullah people and author of *Gullah Cultural Legacies*. In 2005, he received the Carter G. Woodson Memorial Award for his work preserving Gullah heritage and improving community living conditions. In 2008, he was elected Chairman of the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission.



The Penn Center is an African American cultural and education center as well as a significant historical site on Saint Helena Island, South Carolina. Formerly the Penn School, it was one of the first schools founded specifically for the education of African Americans, including the formerly enslaved. Both Victoria Smalls and Emory Campbell worked at the Penn Center and several of the documentary's interviews were conducted at this location.



Explore the Penn Center's website for more information on its long history



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. How would you feel if you could no longer speak your first language or be around others who spoke it? What would you do?
2. Have you ever been to a non-English speaking country where you spoke little or none of the native language? How did you go about trying to communicate? What strategies were successful?
3. In what ways do you think learning to read and write has influenced your spoken language? Have you ever seen a word or phrase written and realized it was different than what you thought it was? *TEACHER TIP: two examples may be students interpreting "would've" as "would of" and "for all intents and purposes" as "for all intensive purposes".*

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What are some factors that have contributed to the development of AAL? What other languages and dialects influenced AAL?
2. What is significant about the Caribbean in relation to AAL?
3. According to John Baugh, what is unique about the linguistic circumstances of African slaves as compared to other immigrant groups who came to the United States? Why is it that the West African languages did not survive the Atlantic crossing intact?

POST-VIEWING

1. In the film, Dye Scott-Rhodan describes her experience of growing up in a Gullah-Geechee community where everyone spoke the same way. When she went to college, she realized that people in other regions spoke very differently. Have you ever had a similar experience? How did it make you feel? If not, how do you think you'd feel about your language if you visited a place like the Gullah-Geechee community?
2. When talking about Gullah-Geechee, Dye Scott-Rhodan remarks, "some they call it broken language but we say broken to who?" The language has historically faced harsh criticisms calling it 'substandard,' 'broken English,' or spoken by 'uneducated, poor Blacks.' What do you think is the effect of being told your primary language of communication is 'broken?' Who decides what is considered broken English and what is considered standard English?
3. AAL has been characterized by society as a sign of laziness and ignorance. In the film, linguist Walter Edwards describes the development of AAL thusly, "What they did was to invent new languages, new varieties taking linguistic properties from the surrounding varieties and creating new forms. These are creations of people put in an absolutely horrible set of circumstances and out of that milieu came new language forms." Does this description change any of your own perceptions of AAL?
4. What can language tell us about history? Why is it important to study and understand the histories of language varieties?

Additional Resources

Green, L. J. (2002). *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This textbook, aimed at students, describes the patterns of AAL at each level of language—sound system, word formation, sentence structures, and discourse routines. It includes discussions about the role of AAL in education, secular and religious realms, literature, and media. Each chapter is paired with exercises for students.

Rickford, J. R., & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

This text discusses both current and historical dimensions of AAL. It highlights the powerful connections between language and society.

Campbell, E. S. (2008). *Gullah cultural legacies: A synopsis of Gullah traditions, customary beliefs, art forms and speech on Hilton Head Island and vicinal Sea Islands in South Carolina and Georgia*. Hilton Head, SC: Gullah Heritage Consulting Services.

This book, based on Emory's own experiences of growing up on Hilton Head Island, includes information and terminology of the Gullah culture past and present.

CHAPTER 5: MIGRATION (28:31-38:15)

This section discusses the social and historical context that contributed to the development of African American Language (AAL) during the period of the Great Migration—sometimes called the “Exodus”—from the rural South to the urban North, and it explores the impact of segregation on AAL.



KEY POINTS



The Great Migration

Between 1916 and 1970, approximately 6 million African Americans moved from the Southern United States to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West in search of better living conditions and work opportunities outside of the Jim Crow South. Before the migration, 90 percent of African Americans lived in the South, largely in rural areas. After the migration, only 53 percent of the African American population remained in the South.

Segregation and language contact in the South versus the North

Linguist Patricia Cukor-Avila explains how the levels of language contact between Blacks and Whites were different in the South and the North in the early 20th century. While the South had Jim Crow laws and institutional segregation, there was language contact. Blacks and Whites often lived close to each other, shopped in the same stores, and worked together as tenant farmers. In the North, there was much less language contact due to de facto segregation which was produced, in part, by a public housing system that confined Blacks to living in small, dense neighborhoods apart from Whites. This situation resulted in little interaction between the majority of African Americans and Whites.

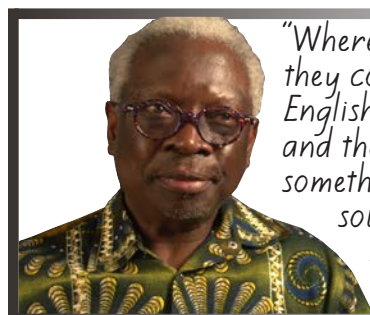
Public housing and the Chicago Black Belt

A prime example of the housing discrimination that produced these segregated and concentrated urban populations of African Americans is the Chicago “Black Belt.” In the early 20th century, the African American population of Chicago was growing rapidly. Whites living in residential blocks formed “restrictive covenants,” legal contracts restricting individuals from renting or selling to Black tenants. These covenants severely limited the housing options for Blacks, forcing them to occupy the same few neighborhoods and forming the Black Belt. By the mid-20th century, 75 percent of the Black population lived in this small chain of neighborhoods spanning thirty blocks on the South Side of Chicago. Because it could not expand horizontally, high-rises were built to confine hundreds of thousands of Blacks into this narrow band of land.

Linguistic isolation and divergence

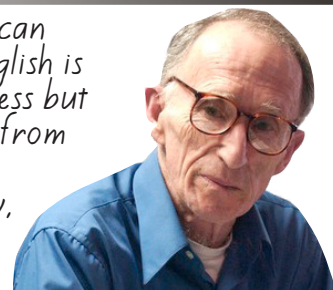
In the film, linguist Arthur Spears says, “Why does Black English exist? Isolation. For a population to develop its own variety of language there has to be some kind of apartness. Whenever people are apart they diverge culturally and linguistically.” During the Great Migration, African Americans brought with them the language varieties they had learned in

the South as they concentrated into urban centers in the West, Midwest, and Northeast. Many African Americans rarely had opportunities for interaction with Whites, creating situations of linguistic isolation. Furthermore, AAL varieties were valued as components of ethnic and cultural identity. Today, AAL varieties continue to diverge from their European American English counterparts, in part, due to persistent segregation and the significance of AAL as an identity marker.



"Wherever there were African slaves they contributed to shaping American English. And then came Jim Crow and then The Great Migration. And something that had emerged in the southeastern part of the United States was spread." -Salikoko Mufwene, linguist

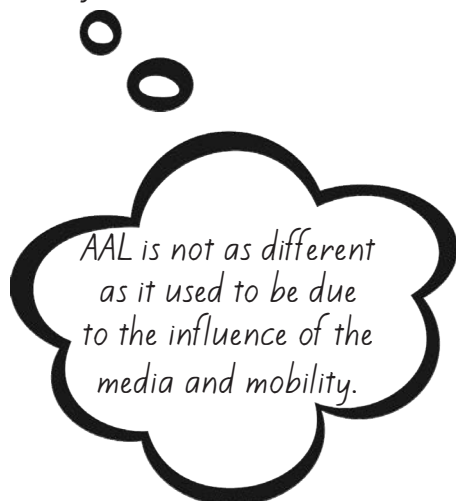
"African American Vernacular English is becoming not less but more different from other dialects." -William Labov, linguist



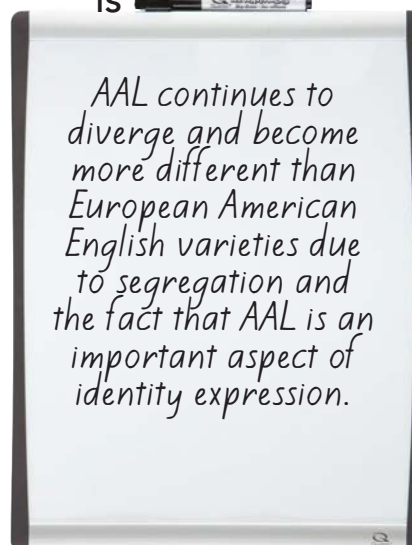
"Only time we saw White people was when we went a town over and they owned the stores, or the mailman." - Professor Griff, musician

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS



Professor Griff (born Richard Griffin), featured in this section, is a member of the famous and politically charged Hip Hop group Public Enemy. Their best-known song "Fight the Power" was written for and featured in Spike Lee's critically acclaimed film *Do the Right Thing*.

*Our freedom of speech is freedom or death
We got to fight the powers that be
Lemme hear you say
Fight the power*



Watch the trailer for *Do the Right Thing*



Listen to "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy



Watch a CBS interview with some of the members of Public Enemy



South Side activist, educator, and civil rights leader, Timuel Black, is interviewed in the film. After surviving the Normandy invasion and the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, Black visited the Buchenwald concentration camp, prompting a lifelong commitment to human rights. Black brought Martin Luther King Jr. to the University of Chicago campus in 1956. He organized Freedom Trains that took thousands of Chicagoans to the March on Washington in 1963, helped end segregation in the Chicago Public Schools, worked as an administrator in the City Colleges of Chicago system, and helped elect the first African American mayor of Chicago.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. Do you think the speech of American English speakers is becoming more similar or more different over time? Are dialects disappearing?
2. What do you think about when you hear the words “migration” and “exodus”? What connotations are similar for the two words? How are they used differently?
3. What impressions do you have about differences in how Whites and Blacks interacted in the North versus the South during the period of American history in which racial segregation was legal? How would you speculate that these differences shaped AAL in the North and in the South during this period?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. How did segregation function differently in the South versus the North? What was different about the amounts of language contact between groups of Whites and Blacks in the South versus the North? How would you speculate that these differences shaped AAL in the North and in the South during this period?

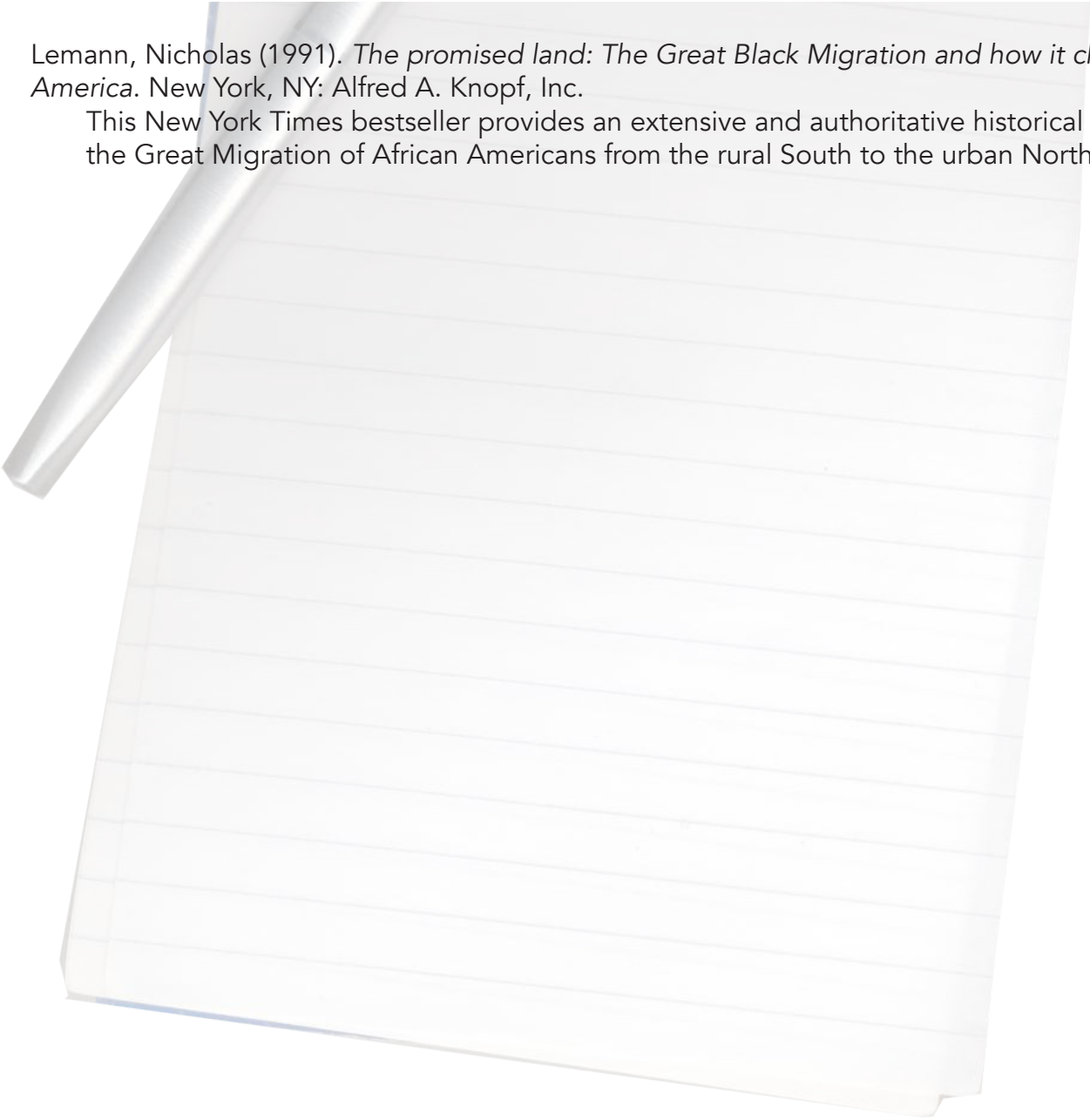
POST-VIEWING

1. How have migration trends affected the languages and dialects in the United States? How is the Great Migration related to the development of AAL varieties? What were some of the effects of this mass exodus?
2. What are some reasons that people believe language is homogenizing and dialects are disappearing? What factors have contributed to the continued divergence of AAL varieties from other European American varieties?
3. Do you think that having different languages and different dialects divides people in the United States? In other countries? Would a global language, common to us all, be good or bad for people? Explain.
4. Can you think of any cultural or artistic movements brought about or influenced by the linguistic and cultural isolation of the urban centers created during the Great Migration? Hint: think about musical and literary movements.

Additional Resources

Gregory, James N. (2005). *The Southern diaspora: How the great migrations of Black and White Southerners transformed America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press

This book focuses on the transformations that occurred in the United States when twenty million Black and White Southerners migrated north and west between 1900 and the 1970s, creating new regional diasporas.



Lemann, Nicholas (1991). *The promised land: The Great Black Migration and how it changed America*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

This New York Times bestseller provides an extensive and authoritative historical telling of the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North.

CHAPTER 6: SKILLS (38:16-49:08)

This section discusses several types of verbal skills that are significant in various Black communities. It explores communicative practices such as verbal sparring, improvisation, and call-and-response refrains in the church, and the rhetorical power of Black activists such as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King



KEY POINTS



Verbal skills

Many African Americans place a high value on the spoken word. Both African cultures and the U.S. slave history have contributed to a strong oral tradition in the Black community which values an individual's abilities to speak spontaneously, creatively, and authoritatively. As linguist Arthur Spears explains in the film, "Why do kids growing up in the Black community have to become skilled at language use? The community requires it; the culture requires it. If you can't defend yourself verbally growing up in a Black community, a traditional Black community, then everybody else picks on you. So you're forced to develop, you can think of them as verbal defenses, I prefer to think of them as verbal skills."

Community discourse practices

When people think about language variation, they often think of vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar differences. However, there is also variation at the discourse level and narrative level. Different dialect and language communities can have different communicative norms and practices. This section depicts some discourse practices of African American communities such as verbal play and the call-and-response routine of Black church services.

Verbal sparring

The types of verbal sparring and one-upmanship depicted in the film have many names—'shooting', 'snapping', 'bagging', 'capping', 'the Dozens', 'sounding', 'signifyin'', 'woofing', 'joning', and others. Some refer to specific types of verbal combat such as insulting the adversary's mother. These practices consist of ritualistic insults and skilled verbal creativity. Both the content and the delivery are important aspects of the practice. Within these battles, participants can make highly negative comments but they are not considered genuinely offensive.



See some examples of 'the dozens' in a segment from the 90s sketch comedy show *In Living Color*



Hip Hop

Hip Hop is a musical genre and subculture developed in the 1970s by African Americans. Some early pioneers of the genre include the Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, and DJ Kool Herc. Foundational stylistic elements of the genre include deejaying/scratching, graffiti painting, B-boying, and MCing/rapping. MCing was influenced by the African American

discourse practices of verbal combat (capping, shooting, bagging, etc.). Hip Hop is a genre that requires a high level of skill in verbal play. As rapper Quest M.C.O.D.Y. observes “There are probably more people that would have been English majors or writers in Hip Hop than there is in any other genre. Just the usage of words, like metaphors, similes, double entendres, triple entendres.” Hip Hop has now spread globally and, as linguist John Baugh explains, “is actually often used by young people in various parts of the world that wish to express defiance to authority.”



Listen to “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash



Oral tradition and the Black church

African Americans have a history of oral tradition rooted in African cultures. Furthermore, because African Americans were denied access to literacy and education, oral communication was the primary mode of cultural preservation for hundreds of years. The communicative practices of Black church congregations are illustrative of the significance of this oral tradition in the Black community. Oral improvisation, freestyle, and call and response dialogue are important aspects of many Black congregations.

The transcendent rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is regarded as one of the most powerful speakers of all time with his “I Have a Dream” speech frequently ranked as one of the greatest and most well-known speeches in history. Though King avoided some of the most heavily stigmatized linguistic features, he consistently used features that marked his African American and Southern urban identity. In the film, linguist Walt Wolfram explains that “What stands out from King is his rhetorical power and his social and political voice, and the fact that it was framed in African American identity and Southern identity is one of the great lessons about that authority and the authenticity of speaking Black in America.”

“For our community we come out of an oral culture. And movements that are transformative in our community always have people who are able to communicate with oral power and dexterity and improvisation and communicate head and heart and spirit and allow those words to take life and flight in the hearts of God’s people.” -Rev. Otis Moss



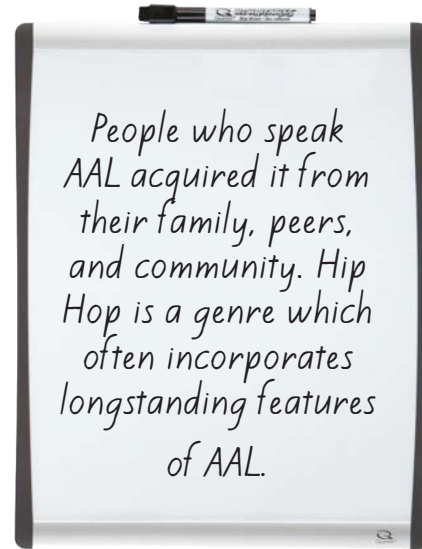
“People think that African American English is picking up these things from Hip Hop, when in fact Hip Hop is making use of longstanding features of African American English.” -John Singler, linguist

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS



In this section, Professor Griff discusses the metaphorical meaning behind the song "Miuzi Weighs a Ton" from Public Enemy's debut album *Yo! Bum Rush the Stage*. Music writer Cheo H. Coker has cited this in the top three most influential albums in Hip Hop history. The unique song title is often commodified as "My uzi weighs a ton."



*It's a big wonder why I haven't gone under
Dodgin' all types of microphone thunder
A fugitive missin' all types of hell*

*All this because I talk so well
When I
Rock, get up, get down
Miuzi weighs a ton*



Trinity United Church of Christ, featured in the film, is the former church of President Barack Obama and the current church of rapper Common. Pastor Jeremiah Wright was the subject of public scrutiny in 2008 when some of his sermons were published in connection to the campaign of President Barack Obama. Rev. Otis Moss III is the current pastor. His father, Otis Moss Jr. worked with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



Check out this interview with Common about his experience with Trinity United Church of Christ



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase “language skills”? Do you think about academic qualities, artistic abilities, multilingualism, a particular person? Which skill do you personally value and why?
2. Do you consider Hip Hop to be an art form? Why or why not? If we assume it is an art form, what sorts of things typify it?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What are some of the labels given to the practice of verbal sparring or verbal one-upmanship in AAL? Keith Cross lists several.
2. What are some ways that Black versus White church congregations use language differently according to the film?

POST-VIEWING

1. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is remembered as one of the greatest speakers of all time. Throughout his speeches, he maintained a speech style that included linguistic features marking both his Black and Southern identity. Why is this significant? What can we learn from King’s success and his use of AAL and Southern American English features?
2. Do you know of any other countries where Hip Hop has become popular? Why do you think Hip Hop has become so popular globally? Are there any common themes conveyed by international Hip Hop?
3. What types of language skills are valued or privileged by American society in general? By the current education system? Which ones are overlooked? Are there any skills associated with Hip Hop that might be translatable to the classroom?

Additional Resources

Alim, H. S. (2009). *Roc the mic right: The language of Hip Hop culture*. New York, NY: Routledge. This is the first book-length analysis of the role of language in Hip Hop culture and the creative and complex discursive practices which have influenced the Hip Hop genre.

Miller, W. J. (2016). *Origins of the dream: Hughes’s poetry and King’s rhetoric*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

In this text, Miller analyses the influences of Langston Hughes’s poetry on Martin Luther King Jr.’s speeches and traces the origin of the famous speech.

Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

This volume contributes to our understanding of Black English by contextualizing it within the greater realms of Black culture and style. Smitherman explores ways in which the rhetorical styles of AAL reflect its African origins.

Wolfram, W., Myrick, C., Forrest, J., and Fox, M.J. (2016, January). Celebrating the linguistics significance of Martin Luther King Jr. Retrieved from: <http://languagelog ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=23517>

In this post, Wolfram et al. break down their analysis of King's speech in four different contexts, revealing how he consistently embodies his Southern and African American identity through language. They draw a connection between language inequality and social justice.

CHAPTER 7: TRANSFORMATION (49:09-59:30)

This section discusses the evolution of African American Language (AAL) and differences that exist between generations of speakers as well as some of the current changes occurring in AAL varieties.



KEY POINTS



Language evolves

All languages change over time. There are both language internal (changes that come from within the linguistic system) and language external (changes that relate to social and psychological conditions) causes of those changes. Some of the external factors influencing language change include geographical divisions, social barriers, and language contact situations.

Generational differences

One way of studying language change is by examining the variation in speech among different generations of speakers. Young people often use language features that distinguish them from older groups. In the film, linguist Patricia Cukor-Avila explains that the peer group has the most influence on the speech of young people.

Urbanization

One type of change occurring in AAL varieties is urbanization. Features of AAL varieties spoken in large urban metropolises are influencing the AAL varieties in smaller, rural regions. Linguist Walt Wolfram explains that “rural kids who used to be much more regionalized want to sound more urban because it’s more hip and so the old time rural styles of African American which tend to be more closely aligned with Southern White varieties are now moving away and becoming much more urban and actually, in some ways, much more like the urban North than some of the Southern urban areas.”

Reasons AAL will continue to exist

AAL is changing and transforming, but it is not disappearing. There are many factors contributing to its continued existence and development. Older generations of AAL speakers continue to use AAL when raising their children. These children will acquire AAL as their first language. The divergence of AAL from its European American English counterparts is further advanced by segregated communities. Many AAL speaking communities continue to lack access to standard varieties due to de facto segregation. Moreover, AAL is linked to culture and identity expression, making it a valuable resource of authentic identity expression for many individuals and communities.

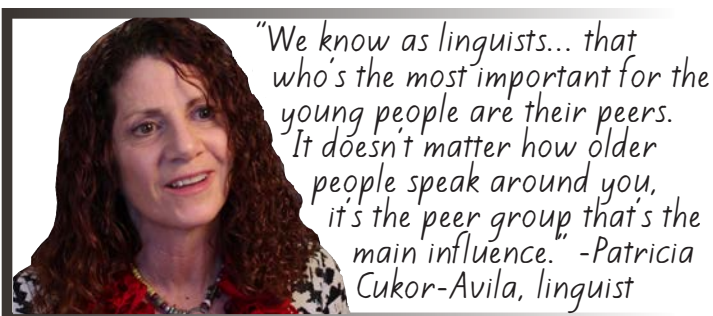
Embracing AAL

For much of U.S. history, AAL has been characterized as a language of ignorance, laziness, and violence. However, some newer narratives characterize AAL as cool, a cultural object of

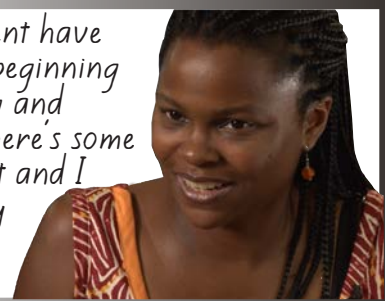
value. Linguist John Baugh points out that for a long time, the sole cause of parody of AAL by White people was racism and mockery whereas now there are people who want to imitate AAL because they think it is cool. While it is heartening to see that positive perceptions of AAL are now possible, it is important to embrace AAL for more than just its "coolness" or "hipness" factor. Greater education and public awareness regarding AAL will allow people to understand it and embrace it as a valuable, systematic, legitimate, culturally and historically grounded language variety.



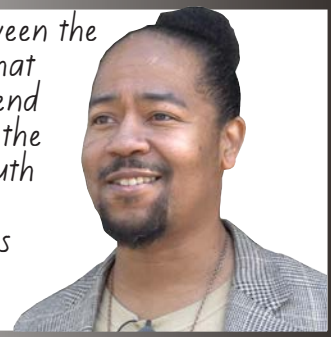
Listen to the powerful spoken-word TedTalk by Jamila Lyiscott celebrating "3 Ways to Speak English"



"People of African descent have been moving from the beginning of time. And interacting and transforming. I think there's some things that are constant and I think it's also constantly transforming." Renee Blake, linguist



"It's a big divide and it's between the elders and the youth. And what happens is, the elders don't tend to want to understand what the youth are doing, and the youth are growing up in a world different than what the elders grew up in." -Derrick Abyss Graham, musician and artist

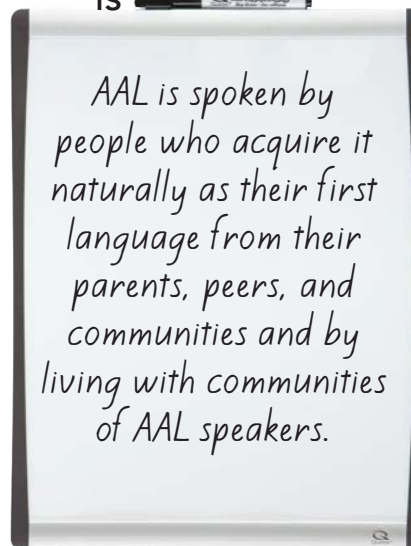


COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

non-linguists may think



the linguistic consensus is



FUN FACTS

DJ Nabs began his DJing career in Atlanta with WVEE radio before producer Jermaine Dupri helped him form a collaboration with Kris Kross. Later he became So So Def Recordings' exclusive DJ backing up Da Brat, Xscape, Jermaine Dupri, and Bow Wow. After years of touring with legendary artists such as Mariah Carey, Ciara, Ludacris, and Michael Jackson, DJ Nabs returned to Atlanta as a full-time radio personality on Hot 97.5.



The song that linguist Renée Blake talks about hearing on the train in the final part of the film is Sir Mix-a-Lot's song "Baby Got Back." It was the second best-selling song in the United States in 1992 after Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You," selling over 2 million physical copies.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. Does language change as people do? Can you give an example of how language has changed over time? Can you think of any words or phrases that just recently became popular?
2. Can you think of any words or phrases that you use with your peers that your parents wouldn't understand (or, at least, didn't use growing up)?
3. What are your impressions of how language differs between urban and rural communities?
4. Do you think that AAL has influenced the way other cultures in America speak? In what ways?
5. Do you think of Hip Hop as a form of art specifically for African Americans or for all cultures? What does it mean that White suburban teens are consistently the nation's largest consumers of Hip Hop music?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What group has the most influence on the speech of young people? Why do you think this is so? Can you think of specific examples of peer influence on your speech?

2. According to John Baugh, how have some of the imitations of Black speech by White speakers changed over the years?

POST-VIEWING

1. Why are urban city centers so influential on the current development of AAL varieties?
2. What influence do peer groups have on speech patterns? Why do peer groups have such a strong influence on speech patterns?
3. What are some reasons that varieties of AAL will continue to exist?
4. What are some benefits of embracing varieties of AAL?
5. Have any of your opinions or conceptions of 'Talking Black' changed after seeing this film? Have you learned anything new about AAL? About language in general?
6. In the film, Derrick Abyss Graham says, "It's a big divide and it's between the elders and the youth and what happens is the elders don't tend to want to understand what the youth are doing and the youth are growing up in a world different than what the elders grew up in." What are some differences between how younger and older generations speak? Do you think these changes over time are good or bad?
7. Do you believe that the older ways of doing things should be changed or should be preserved? Why? Can you think of some language examples of things that have been preserved and some things that are changed?

Additional Resources

Alim, H. S. (2009). *Roc the mic right: The language of Hip Hop culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This is the first book-length analysis of the role of language in Hip Hop culture and the creative and complex discursive practices which have influenced the Hip Hop genre.

Kozol, J. (2012). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Broadway Paperbacks.

Over two years Kozol visited schools across the nation and interviewed students, teachers, and administrators. This book reveals his findings, that the divides between differing economic classes and racial groups are not only extreme but increasingly widening within the school system.

Wolfram, W., & Schilling, N. (2016). *American English: Dialects and variation* (3rd ed.). Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

This text discusses the social and linguistic factors that have contributed to dialect variation in American English. It explains the functions of dialects and the principles of language variation while using language that is accessible to students and a general audience. It includes an extensive glossary and appendix of dialect features.

MEET THE LINGUISTS & THE PRODUCERS

John Baugh, Margaret Bush Wilson Professor in Arts and Sciences, Washington University in St. Louis. Baugh has pioneered research in a number of descriptive studies and applications related to AAL, and has led the investigation of housing discrimination and linguistic profiling. He has served as a key advisor on issues of language discrimination and education.

Renée A. Blake, Associate Professor of Linguistics, Director of Africana Studies, New York University. Blake's research examines language contact, race, ethnicity and class with a focus on AAL, Caribbean English Creoles, and New York City English. She served as a contact person for the collection of footage in New York City and consulted on the interface between Caribbean English and African American English in New York.

Patricia Cukor-Avila, Professor of Linguistics and Technical Communication, University of North Texas. Cukor-Avila has conducted formative research on rural African American speech in Texas and the differences between urban and rural speech in the South. Her input guided our presentation of urban versus rural speech.

Danica Cullinan, Producer and director. Cullinan produced and directed *Spanish Voices* (2011) and *Cedars in the Pines: The Lebanese in North Carolina* (2012), and with Hutcheson, won an Emmy for her recent production, *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee* (2015). She has a background in sociolinguistics, information and library science, and film production, uniquely combining the diverse expertise needed for this project.

Walter F. Edwards, Professor of Linguistics, Wayne State University. Edwards specializes in pidgin and Creole linguistics, particularly Guyanese Creole studies. He has also focused on AAL and the sociolinguistics of rap lyrics.

Lisa J. Green, Professor of Linguistics, University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Green's research on the formal structure of AAL and the acquisition of language by African American children provided an essential guide for our presentation of language development in early childhood and the linguistic structure of AAL.

Neal Hutcheson, Director and producer. Hutcheson has produced documentaries on topics that range from the regional cultures of Russia, South Asia, and South America to a series of documentaries on language diversity in the Southeastern United States. Among his documentary productions are *Indian by Birth: The Lumbee Dialect* (2001), *This is the Last Dam Run of Likker I'll Ever Make* (2002), *Mountain Talk* (2004), *Voices of North Carolina* (2005), *The Queen Family: Appalachian Tradition and Back Porch Music* (2006), *The Last One* (2008), *The Carolina Brogue* (2009), *The Outlaw Lewis Redmond* (2009), *Core.Sounders: Living from the Sea* (2013), *Popcorn Sutton: A Hell of a Life* (2014), and *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee* (2015). Hutcheson has won numerous awards for his productions, including two Emmys for cultural documentaries, a third Emmy nomination, the Brown-Hudson Award from the North Carolina Folklore Society (2011), and the North Carolina Filmmaking Award from the Carolina Film Festival. His work has appeared on PBS, the Sundance Channel, the History Channel, A&E, and the Documentary Channel.

Sharese King, Ph.D. Candidate in Linguistics, Stanford University. King's research focuses on AAL and identity construction.

Sonja L. Lanehart, Breckenridge Endowed Chair in Literature and Humanities, University of Texas at San Antonio. Lanehart is a nationally recognized sociolinguist who specializes in the study of English literature and linguistics, humanities, education and African-American studies. She advises the production team on defining and embracing diversity in AAL.

Salikoko S. Mufwene, Frank J. McLoraine Distinguished Service Professor in Linguistics and Humanities, University of Chicago. Mufwene currently studies language evolution with a focus on language speciation such as the emergence of creole varieties, AAL, and indigenized Englishes. He has also studies structural aspects of Gullah, Caribbean English creoles, and AAL.

John R. Rickford, J.E. Wallace Sterling Professor of Linguistics and the Humanities, Stanford University. Rickford has extensive research and applied experience in both creole languages and AAL. He has assisted the team in facilitating meetings with educators involved in controversies and innovative educational programs related to AAL.

Jeffrey L. Reaser, Professor of Linguistics, Director of the Teacher Education Program in English, North Carolina State University. Reaser has extensive experience and expertise in material preparation for school-based and public audiences, and helped develop online materials for the documentary.

John Singler, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, New York University. Singler has conducted extensive research on Liberian English and its relationship to English in the African diaspora. He guided the production team on the connection between African American speech in the United States and in the African diaspora, particularly West Africa.

Arthur K. Spears, Professor of Linguistics, Professor of Anthropology, City University of New York (CUNY). Spears is a specialist in AAL and pidgins and creoles, as well as race and ideology. He has consulted on the notion of Standard African American English, and provided general input on diversity within AAL varieties.

Tracey L. Weldon, Associate Professor, University of South Carolina. Weldon has conducted research on Gullah in South Carolina, and currently examines language use among middle-class African Americans. Her input on language variation for the socioeconomic spectrum of American Americans and audio-recorded illustrations of code-switching from her conversations and presentations were essential for representing language differences and style shifting within African American communities.

Walt Wolfram, Executive Producer, William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor of Linguistics, North Carolina State University. Wolfram has pioneered research on social and ethnics dialects since the 1960s, including AAL. He is interested in disseminating sociolinguistic information to the public via documentaries, museum exhibits, books, and other materials on language diversity. Wolfram has extensive experience in public outreach and the production of audiovisual materials to complement his sociolinguistic research. He has now served as executive producer for 12 nationally and regionally distributed broadcast programs under the Language and Life Project at North Carolina State University.