

Is There An Authentic African American Speech Community: Carla Revisited

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1. Introduction¹

In the 1990s where the language and musical styles of black popular culture are disseminated to international masses (Dent 1992), young people of diverse backgrounds are emulating representations of urban African and African American youth culture. For example, in Japan, youth have appropriated the baggy dress style and even dreadlocked hairstyles associated with African reggae and African American hip hop and rap culture (Jones 1993). Similarly, Russian, British and Asian youth have, in recent decades, adopted the discourse and dress styles of their Afro-Caribbean and African American peers² (Hewitt 1986, Gilroy 1987, Jones 1988, Knobel 1994, Rampton 1995, Wulff 1995). For many of these non-black youth, the language and dress styles of their black peers and musical icons are tropes of resistance against universal forms of oppression (cf. Morgan 1993b) and a means to construct "cool" or "hard" identities and align with their black peers (Rampton 1995, Bucholtz 1996).

Yet, white adolescents need not rely on peer associations with blacks in order to hone their outward affinities to black language and culture. With the explosion of hip hop magazines, televised jukeboxes featuring the latest rap and soul videos, and stand-up comedy and films about urban black street life, youth of diverse backgrounds can now educate themselves within the confines of their bedrooms (Jones 1988, Heard 1994, Cutler 1996). Black discourse styles have begun to constitute a form of symbolic

capital for many non-black youth (cf. Bourdieu 1991). Thus, it is not surprising that some find it fitting to speak creole and sport African styles of dress in contexts where it is sanctioned by their cultural mentors, as well as in their wider interactions in Afro-Caribbean clubs or communities (Hewitt 1986, Jones 1988, Rampton 1995).

It is often in the latter more public domain that African Americans consider non-blacks' explicit identification with black culture as problematic. Consequently, though a white U.S. rap group called Young Black Teenagers views its name and emulation of African American rap styles as a way to undermine racial stereotypes and unite diverse youth under a shared hip hop mentality (Brown 1991), many African American youth see this group as appropriating aspects of urban adolescent black culture and identity. Moreover, whites whose outward expressions reflect black language and culture are often derogatorily labeled "whites who are trying (or want) to be black" and "wiggas" (Heard 1994, Smitherman 1994).³ Similarly, Jones (1988) and Rampton (1995) find that white Britons who viewed their use of creole as a linguistic alignment with Rastafarian culture and resistance were openly reprimanded by Afro-Caribbeans who interpreted their stylistic use of creole as a stereotypical cooption of African culture and identity.

In this paper, I discuss a white speaker's use of a variety of African American English (AAE) that is predominantly spoken by urban adolescent males. This variety is one which is characterized by the use of African American prosodic system, including rhythm and tempo, timing and pitch, rising and falling intonation, the use of African American lexical items and idiomatic expressions, and the relative high use of phonological forms [d/ substitution for /th/ and postvocalic /r/] thought to be characteristic of AAE speakers (cf. Morgan 1996a, Mufwene 1992). Unlike the non-black working class adolescents discussed in previous studies (Hewitt 1986, Jones 1988), this

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² Silverman (1975) and Labov et al. (1968) have also documented the use of AAE grammar and phonology by Puerto Rican youth with strong peer group associations with African Americans.

³ The stylistic appropriation of African American music and idiomatic expressions have been critically noted in previous scholarship as well. See, for example, Dillard 1977; 1972, Walker 1971, Williams 1971, and Brown 1968.

speaker is not an adolescent male but is in his mid-20s and was socialized in an upper-middle class suburb in New York city. Further, his use of AAE is fairly consistent across social and formal contexts. At a time when the notion of identity has been firmly redefined as ever-shifting, multiple, fragmented and decentered (Hall 1992a; 1992b, Mercer 1994), this speaker problematizes the notion of an "authentic" African American speech community (AASC) by bringing into question the etic, often linguistic, standards by which its socio-linguistic authenticity has been defined. The social and political implications of this and similar cases further expose the politics of language, ideology and identity within the AASC.

2. Carla Revisited

Though the above examples of linguistic cooption or alternatively, respect and flattering may appear modern, they are in many ways directly related to theoretical issues which emerged in the 1970s concerning who speaks AAE? This question was indirectly addressed by Hatala (1976) and Labov (1980) in their analyses of Carla, a white adolescent attending a predominantly black urban school in Camden, New Jersey. Intrigued by Carla's verbal skill within this AASC, Hatala surveyed 46 African Americans who unanimously classified Carla as African American after hearing her speech sample. In a linguistic analysis of Carla's speech, however, Labov noted that although she reportedly sounded black through her use of African American syntactic, prosodic and lexical markers, Carla employed few grammatical indicators considered significant by linguists. Labov concluded that Carla was not an authentic AAE speaker and thus, not a member of the African American speech community. This was a powerful conclusion as it presented linguistics as the *definitive* criteria by which to determine "authentic" AAE speakers and legitimate their status's within the AASC. Since Labov's attempt to delimit the boundaries of the AASC discounted the social situatedness of discourse and over-stated the import of grammar and phonology (Kroskrity 1993), it is not surprising that several scholars have

taken issue with the theoretical bases of Labov's findings (cf. Bucholtz 1995).

Labov's reliance on—and explicit preference for—grammatical and phonological criteria necessarily precludes the import of linguistic ideologies as, following Silverstein (1979) "... sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language and structure and use." Many researchers (e.g., Morgan 1994a, Kroskrity 1992, Preston 1989, Butters 1984), including Labov himself (1975; 1972a; 1972b) likewise note the significance of individual language attitudes in uncovering the shared social and interpretive norms of language usage that characterize members of a speech community and shape their evaluations of their own and others' speech. But, as Woolard (1992) notes, Labov's oversight, though, is not surprising since he views ideology as overt political discourse and thus explicitly discounts the power of ideology to affect speech forms (Labov 1979:329).

A strictly linguistic analysis also fails to account for metalinguistic means through which members demonstrate their competence, as well as validate others', in a speech community (Spears 1988, Rickford 1985, Sankoff 1989). Duranti (1994) notes that members of a speech community demonstrate their competence by adhering to discourse norms as active consumers and producers of texts, as well as through their ability to simultaneously exploit heteroglossia and reproduce at least an appearance of an encompassing system (see also Morgan 1994a, Kroskrity 1993, Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968). Likewise, Carla's use of Standard American English (SAE) grammar and African American syntactic, prosodic and lexical cues might also indicate her command of an African American linguistic repertoire (Gumperz 1982). As DeBose (1992) argues, this linguistic repertoire is one which emphasizes the use of both SAE and AAE as an inherent aspect of AAE and the AASC (see Kroskrity 1993 for a similar discussion of the value of linguistic variation among the Arizona Tewa). Moreover, Labov's linguistic assessment of Carla was based upon the syntactic and phonological speech practices of teenage male street gangs (Labov 1966; 1972b) although research, including Labov's (1991) has shown that women's speech is typically more standard than men's (cf. Gal

1991, Morgan 1991, Henley 1995). In order to more fully appreciate how speakers like Carla successfully negotiate their competence as AAE speakers, additional attention must be devoted to the personal, biographical and interactional basis of linguistic knowledge—areas which increasingly call for qualitative forms of analysis (Kroskrity 1993).

Accordingly, the current study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the speech of three males fictitiously named Mike, Greg, and Ron. All three speakers are college educated, from middle class backgrounds, and were in their early to mid-20s when they were interviewed. Although all three identify themselves culturally as African American, Mike and Greg are African American while Ron is Anglo-American. Ron employs a variety of discourse styles associated with young, hip, urban African American male culture. Several of Ron's African American classmates likewise describe him as "talking black" and more pejoratively as "thinking he talks black." In contrast, Mike and Greg employ discourse styles more closely associated with educated and middle-class African American speakers. Greg employs both AAE and SAE language styles, though his speech has relatively more SAE grammatical and phonological forms. Greg uses SAE phonology and grammar fairly consistently. Mike's employs SAE grammar and phonology as well, but frequently codeswitches into AAE through his use of prosody, phonology, and idiomatic expressions. Mike occasionally speaks with a nasal. Ron, Greg and Mike interact quite extensively in African American speech communities and all three admit that their respective statuses as AAE speakers have been previously called into question by (often lower class and adolescent African American speakers).

In replicating Labov and Hatala's analyses, I provide a quantitative linguistic analysis of Ron, Mike and Greg's speech, examining the extent to which they employ AAE grammar and phonology. Understanding that linguistic analysis is insufficient in and of itself in revealing each speaker's degree of linguistic competence, I also use discourse analysis to explore their use of AAE in relation to the African American linguistic repertoire. These related analyses attempt to critically revisit the question, "Who speaks AAE?" addressed in Labov (1980) and Hatala's

(1976) studies. Lastly, and in an attempt to address what it *means* to speak AAE, I present survey results for 92 survey respondents (45 African American, 33 Anglo American, 8 Latino and 4 Asian) who, after hearing a speech sample, provided race and social class assessments of each speaker. Collectively, these findings juxtapose etic assessments of "Who speaks AAE" with emic evaluations of what it *means* to speak a particular variety of AAE. In doing so, they directly address the heterogeneity of speakers and the politics of language, identity, and ideology within the AASC. Before assessing the three speaker's place within the AASC, it is first necessary to discuss previous literature concerning, "Who speaks AAE?" and "What (does) it mean to speak AAE?"

3. The African American Speech Community

3.1. Who Speaks AAE?

Smitherman (1977) notes that AAE is spoken predominantly by lower-class African Americans, though African American adolescents irrespective of class use AAE grammar and phonology more than adults (cf. Morgan 1994a). Rickford et al. (1991) likewise found copula absence (e.g., He Ø funny) to be quite common among the youngest African American speakers in their East Palo Alto sample.

Even among adolescents, however, the strict use of AAE grammar and phonology across formal and informal contexts is quite marked as they demonstrate an ability to codeswitch between AAE and SAE when speaking with their elders and other authority figures (Morgan, personal communication). In fact, many African Americans display a command of both AAE and SAE, though individual speakers differ with respect to their use of each variety (Dillard 1972, Morgan 1996b). Middle class speakers employ less AAE features, yet codeswitch between Standard American English (SAE) and AAE (Spears 1988, DeBose 1992). Additionally, Morgan (1993a; 1994a) notes that working class speakers also employ both of these codes for conversational signifying.

3.2. What does it Mean to Speak AAE? African American Linguistic Ideologies

Perceptions of AAE vary within the AASC ranging from the view of language as a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity to ambivalence or, though less common, a strong disdain for its use (cf. Morgan 1994a). With respect to the latter view, some African Americans (often teachers and lower-middle class speakers) have rejected the alternative labels of AAE (Black English and Black English Vernacular) and its use by other (allegedly lower class and uneducated) African American speakers on the basis that AAE is pathological, disordered and lazy speech which threatens speakers' educational and economic success (Brown 1991, Speicher & McMahon 1992, Morgan 1994a).

African Americans who are more sympathetic to AAE often see this variety as being intricately linked to their ethnic and cultural identity. This perspective is demonstrated in African American speakers' strong disdain for being accused of speaking or talking "white" (cf. Morgan 1994a). Additionally, while acknowledging the marginalization of AAE in wider society, AAE speakers also see their language as a form of symbolic capital which provides them with access to certain rights and privileges within the AASC (cf. Morgan 1994a).

The ability to speak AAE is, for example, often considered to be indexical of a speaker's racial consciousness such that the strict use of SAE is indicative of a low sense of ethnic and cultural pride (Morgan 1994a). Likewise, middle class African Americans, and youth in particular, who were not socialized within the African American speech community attempt to assert their cultural consciousness by speaking the variety of AAE accessible to them via rap and hip-hop culture. Dillard (1977) and Baugh (1987; 1992) have also shown that upper-middle class African American college students hypocorrect in their use of AAE phonology and grammar. These students also attempt to speak AAE in both formal and informal settings, though with varying degrees of social and linguistic success. Labov (1979) presents a related case in which a 25 year-old, college-educated African American male, Steve K, attempted to reverse his pattern of style

shifting towards the norm of careful speech in order to return to his earlier vernacular.

3.3. African American Discourse Styles & Verbal Genres

Members of the AASC often demonstrate their communicative competence through their adherence to shared norms governing the proper use and interpretation of discourse styles and verbal genres across social contexts. Morgan (cf. 1994a) argues that these shared norms and ideologies are rooted in a social, historical, and political reality which mandated that African Americans develop modes of communicating among themselves as well as in the presence of potential spies or over-hearers.

Likewise, African Americans developed a counter-language during slavery which relied on an African system of indirectness (Morgan 1991; 1993a; 1994a; 1996b). Within this system of indirectness, words or phrases and social encounters can have contradictory or multiple meanings beyond their traditional English interpretations. As Morgan likewise notes, elements of *double entendre* pervade slave songs and contemporary hip hop and rap styles. To illustrate, she notes that the term "bad" is used by AAE speakers to denote something positive.

AAE speakers also demonstrate their competence through the use of prosodic features belonging to a larger interpretive practice called "*reading dialect*" (Morgan 1996b). Reading dialect occurs when members of the African American community contrast or otherwise highlight obvious features of AAE and SAE in an unobvious and unambiguous manner to make a point (Morgan 1996b: 26). Within this practice, speaker can employ rising and falling intonation, loud talking, vowel lengthening, rhythm and tempo, timing and high pitch,—as well as range of accompanying kinesic strategies, to prescribe specific responses from speakers, targets and hearers. For example, speakers can employ *marking*, which involves mimicking a language variety out of context in such a way that it carries an expressive value towards an intended subject. Morgan also notes that speaking rhythmically (often with regularized intervals between talks and pauses) signals that the interaction is highly marked as African American and likely to lead to conversational signifying (1996b: 29).

In addition to establishing speaker competence, the use of these discourse styles and verbal genres constitute a speaker's social face and as such, mark that a conversation has evolved to entail cultural forms of discourse, interpretation and resolution (cf. Morgan 1996a).

4. An Overview of AAE Grammar & Phonology

Speakers also employ AAE grammar in ways which shift contextual frames in conversation (Gumperz 1982b). Deletion of the copula *be* or auxiliary *be* (overwhelmingly *is* and *are* contractions) is easily one of AAE's most extensively studied grammatical features. The sentence "We Ø limited in what we can do" illustrates copula deletion in AAE. This sentence is realized in SAE as "We are limited in what we can do."

Research on copula variation (*i.e.*, *copula contraction and deletion*) has addressed whether AAE has derived from African-based creoles, European English or some combination of the two (cf. Mufwene 1994). While the origins of AAE are important, they extend beyond the scope of this paper. This section provides a general overview of the AAE copula system.⁴

The absence of copula⁵ may occur in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular, as well as in the plural forms. The most influential research in this area has investigated distinct grammatical constraints, or the environments favoring and the rules governing copula contraction and deletion. Labov's (1969b; 1972b) variable rule for contraction and deletion provides a ranked order of the grammatical environment most conducive to copula deletion. He found the environments which constrain the deletion rule (in order from least to most favorable) to include predicate noun phrases,

adjectives and locatives, verbs, and the auxiliary *gon(na)* before a verb:

Figure 1: Grammatical Environments Favoring Copula Deletion

LEAST FAVORABLE	1. In present before predicate nouns and adjectives.	<i>He a friend.</i> <i>He tired.</i>
	2. In adjectives, locative and comitative phrases.	<i>She over there.</i> <i>She with us.</i>
↓	3. Auxiliary forms "be...ing"	<i>He working with us.</i>
	4. Auxiliary <i>gon(na)</i> before a verb	<i>She gon(na) do well.</i>
MOST FAVORABLE		

Labov's work has since been revisited by a number of dialectologists and creolists in efforts to refine certain aspects of the rule (Rickford 1991) and to better understand AAE's relation to West African creoles and SAE (Stewart 1969, Dillard 1972, Baugh 1980, Winford 1992).

The habitual marker *be* is another highly debated grammatical feature thought to distinguish AAE from SAE (Fasold 1972, Myhill 1988, Spears 1988). In AAE, the habitual *be* has the same copula and auxiliary functions as the conjugated forms *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were* in SAE. Yet, unlike SAE, the habitual *be* indicates a recurring state or activity and its form is not derived from *will be* or *would be*. Smitherman (1985) differentiates the habitual *be* from the future *be* as follows: Habitual be: *I be there* (Gloss: I (usually) be/am there), Future be: *I be there* (Gloss: I will be there).

With respect to its usage, Mufwene (1994) and Morgan (1994a) note that when a verb heads the predicate phrase, the verb must be in the progressive as in, "She be talkin' every time I come" (Morgan 1994:332). Mufwene also provides another form: *be + nonverbal predicate*, as in "I be tired by the end of the day," which can be glossed as "I am [usually] tired by the end of the day." Although these constructions are usually non-stative, they also occur with stative constructions (Richardson 1991, Morgan 1994a).

Been as a remote present perfect form is another celebrated feature of AAE and generally refers to the *unstressed been*. The *unstressed been* is illustrated as a remote present perfect

⁴ The reader will likewise notice the conspicuous absence of scholars who have reviewed the copula from dialectology or creolist perspectives (cf. Winford 1990, Holm 1984, Le Page and DeCamp 1960, Turner 1949).

⁵ Earlier studies of copula variation argued copula absence to be an absolute feature of AAE (Rickford et al 1991, Stewart 1969, Bailey 1965). The argument of zero copula, though, is understood to be a clear overstatement among contemporary scholars.

form in the following sentence, *Mary been working here for a week now*. [Gloss: Mary has been working here for a week now]. Labov (1969a) argues that *been* appears in contexts where it seems like "have" was deleted, such as in *They been gone*. Yet, the AAE *stressed been* is used regardless of the form of the subject or whether *have* is present or past tense (Stewart 1968, Dillard 1972, Rickford 1975, Smitherman 1985). Mufwene (1994) illustrates the latter case in "I bin know(in) you" which means, "I have known you for a long time." This *stressed been*, as described by Stewart (1965), Loflin (1970), Dillard (1972), Fickett (1972), and Rickford (1975; 1977), essentially serves as a tense marker (Morgan 1991) or a past perfect marker (cf. Fasold and Wolfram 1975).

Done marks the perfective in AAE, and in some cases duly acts as an intensifier (Mufwene 1994). Spears (1988) illustrates the perfective *done* in *She done took it* [Gloss: She took it!] which can be heard in the speech of many southern whites and African Americans in southern and northern urban areas. *Done* normally occurs before the verb in the same position as the auxiliary *have* and usually acts as the equivalent of *have*. Labov (1972a) notes that *done* encodes an intensive meaning that is not possible in SAE. Essentially, *done* serves as an adverb, functioning sometimes like *already* or *really* and has lost its status as a verb (56). Both *been* and *done* have also been observed among West African Creoles, including Gullah (Mufwene 1994, Rickford 1977; 1975).

The AAE negative system includes multiple negations and negative inversion (Mufwene 1994, Spears 1988, Smitherman 1985, Whatley 1981, Labov 1972a). Spears (1988) illustrates the use of a double negative in the sentence *It ain't nobody in there*, which translates into *There is no one in there* in SAE. Labov (1972a) and Spears (1988) note the use of negative inversion in the phrase *Don't nobody know it's really a God*, which can be glossed in SAE as *Nobody knows whether there is really a God*.

Morgan (1994b) notes that AAE methods of pluralization, possessive marking, and verbal agreement contrast significantly with SAE. According to Labov (1980), AAE does not use the verbal -s in subject-verb agreement and AAE speakers likewise do not have an underlying third singular -s. This is illustrated in the

sentence *She laugh funny*. Baugh (1983) also found that the occurrence of /s/ where the form can represent pluralization, possession and subject-verb agreement can also depend on the speech event (Morgan 1994:331). In a similar vein, Mufwene (1994:11) cites the absence of the possessive marker in sentences such as "*he like/see me*" and/or "*my two puppy/dog*" as characterizing the grammatical possibilities in AAE.

AAE is also marked, though not exclusively, by several phonological features, including the variable absence of interdental fricatives such as *think* and *then*, which are substituted by /t/ or /d/ in word initial position (Morgan 1994a, Mufwene 1994). AAE is also considered to be non-rhotic or /r/-less in word final position, thus yielding /mo:/ for *more* or /fo:/ for *four* (Labov 1966, Mufwene 1994, Morgan 1994a). AAE speakers also lower the vowel /i/ to /æ/ before /ŋ/ to yield *takin'* for *taking*. Similarly, the diphthong /ay/ is phonologically reduced to /i/ in cases like /mɪ/ for /my/ or /ovɪ/ for /over/.

Vowel lengthening is another feature of expressive speech among African Americans (Morgan 1996b). AAE speakers similarly use *timing and rhythm* in creative and strategic ways in both formal and informal conversation. Morgan notes that rhythmic speech often signals that the interaction is highly marked as African American and is likely to lead to conversational signifying (1996b:29).

5. Ethnographic Description of Participants

Ron, Mike and Greg use some of the discourse and linguistic features described above. Ron is a white male who self-identifies with black identity and culture. At the time of the study, Ron was in his mid-20s and pursuing a graduate degree in African American studies at a major university. Ron grew up in an upper middle class suburb in New York, where Standard American English (SAE) was spoken in his immediate community and at home. As a youth, he interacted with African Americans residing in a peripheral community and was otherwise exposed to African American culture through hip hop, rap and other products of popular culture. Ron emphasizes the major role that hip hop has played in

introducing him to African American culture. He states with adolescent phonology and the use of the unstressed *been*, "You know like hip hop been a part of /mə/ life like you know /fə/ /evə/."

Ron's identification with adolescent urban African American culture is also marked by his physical representation. Ron's rhythmic gait resembles what several African American comedians (e.g., Richard Pryor) and Johnson (1975) have described as a performed "cool" and markedly "black" walk. At the time of the interview, Ron wore Cross Colors, and other brightly colored and baggy "gear" associated with the 1992 hip hop scene. His hair was cut in a *fade*, a common hairstyle among African American males which is high on top and very short or completely shaved on the sides and back (Smitherman 1994:106).

As Ron's graduate education included upper-division seminars on African American English and African American musical styles, Ron developed a sophisticated metalanguage for describing AAE and the important role it played in indexing identity and racial consciousness among African American speakers. Sometimes, Ron would challenge African Americans' racial authenticity based on their use of a particular register or their knowledge of African and African American history. As a classmate turned informal interviewer, I was not immune from such identity checks. At the time of the interview, Ron was taking a graduate seminar on African American English.

I also conducted informal ethnographic observations of Ron in a graduate seminar. Ron's use of the AAE prosodic system and select grammatical markers was not affected by context (formal, informal, age of addressee), although his African American peers seemed to operate with another set of criteria. When Ron's comments involved contextualized descriptions of hip hop or other social and cultural aspects of the African American speech community (as was often the case), Ron used African American phonology and grammar quite freely. Yet, even when engaged in serious speech (e.g., taking a political stance, referring to other scholars) Ron at the very least made use of the AAE prosodic system. Most of Ron's African American peers used (SAE) and Standard African American English (SAAE) during classroom discussions. As such, some of Ron's peers felt as

though Ron had not registered—or did not acknowledge through practice—the range of codes characterizing an African American linguistic repertoire or the norms governing the use of AAE in various contexts (Anderson 1977, Ferguson 1977, DeBose 1992).⁶ Because Ron appears to lack an awareness of the appropriate contexts in which to use AAE and fails to demonstrate an ability to move between more formal and informal African American speech varieties, he was viewed by many of his African American peers as performing a stereotyped version of AAE. In this way, Ron's speech emulates an adolescent variety and as such, is more commensurate with Baugh's (1987; 1992) description of upper-middle class blacks who employed AAE phonology and grammar in both formal and informal university settings.

Ron's background would seem to suggest that his use of AAE was acquired later on in his life. Ron himself acknowledges that when he was younger, hip hop did not occupy a prominent place in his life. He states, "I can /rimɪmbɪ/ back in /nɪ/ *day* (.) but I was only about ... probably about seven or eight so it was ((chuckles)) .. it wasn't as (.1) as big of a thing..." It was in Ron's late teen years that hip hop became a salient feature of his social life. At one point, Ron suggested that his use of AAE was actually strategic. In order for him to make important contributions to the African American community, Ron felt that a command of African

⁶ One of Ron's peers made the following comment about him as a participant in Matthew's (1996) study. (The speaker had been asked whether they thought members of other races could be considered black): "...It's like this one, and I'm just going to call him 'Brotha'. There's this Anglo American ... and when I sat there and talked to him, he just had the lingo down, hip hop and everything. I never felt whiter than sitting by him. And I remember thinking, 'Where did he get all of this?' For him, they were very much acquired like by MTV ... There's no way that someone like him could identify to, let's say maybe a historical past because that history is not his. And he can watch MTV, Yo! MTV Raps how much he wants but that's not going to make him any Blacker ... You know what people are calling Blackness has sort of turned into a commodity. And you got the lingo down, you got the hip hop down, you got everything. You know, you're sort of Blacker, and that's definitely something that's part of our heritage. But understanding that doesn't put you into that Black sensibility."

American culture (and presumably AAE) was absolutely essential. Ron states, "...And when I sit up in a boardroom you know and say something outlandish like (1.0) um you know 'The Milwaukee Academy [a school for young black males with an explicit Afrocentric philosophy] isn't such a bad idea but it's positive affects to it you know' ... I need to be able to say 'Look I've spent time studying this' because I can't just say I know what I'm talking about because my ... physical manifestations and representations (1) I-E my skin color will ... trigger a certain reaction automatically that I'm supposed to have no connection ... to understanding ... or empathy to that perspective okay regardless of whatever..."

Mike and Greg, the two African American male participants, were socialized in middle to upper-middle class African American communities in Los Angeles. They were selected to participate because of their class and age backgrounds, their use of AAE, and their explicit identification with African American culture, all aspects shared by Ron. Like Ron, both Mike and Greg supported the notion that one's use of AAE was a reflection of one's racial consciousness. Yet, both also added that, in practice, their use of AAE was relegated to less formal and more African-American dominated contexts. Mike and especially Greg revealed their disdain for being accused of "talking white" by both African Americans and other ethnic groups. Both reported that their linguistic repertoires consisted of both AAE and SAE and their use of these codes varied across social contexts and with various speakers.

Mike, a recent college graduate, seemed to have the greatest command over African American speech varieties. In several interviews and phone conversations, Mike codeswitched between SAE and AAE. At the time of the interview, he was working in a law firm and had interests in pursuing a law degree. In our interview, Mike noted his and his other black colleagues' tendency to codeswitch to AAE in order to acknowledge their cultural affinity while working within the court system. Mike's attire ranged from business suit to sweat pants, tee shirt and baseball cap worn backwards. He also sported a *fade*.

The community in which Greg was socialized is mixed between middle and upper middle class. His parents are first-

generation members of the middle-class and as Greg notes, have stressed the values of hard work throughout his life. Greg attributes his parents' encouragement to his success at a major university; He graduated with a host of academic and service awards with a degree in English. For Greg, English was directly related to the refinement of his speaking skills. Greg reasoned that this major would enable him to communicate effectively in a (white) business world. Unlike Ron and Mike, Greg seldom sported clothes that were markedly associated with the early 1990's hip hop scene. In fact, even when dressed casually, Greg's undergraduate ensemble consisted of top designer labels.

6. Description of Data

To elicit everyday speech from the three speakers, ethnographic interviews were conducted at my home during May and June of 1992. I had already established a rapport with Ron and Greg prior to their interviews given the fact that they were casual acquaintances and college peers. I met Mike through a mutual acquaintance and after several phone conversations, successfully solicited his participation in the study. In acknowledging the interview process as implicitly involving expectations on the part of the interviewee (Button 1987), as well as the interviewer, I made conscious attempts to present myself in a manner consistent with my prior informal interactions with the participants. Likewise, I didn't self monitor my speech and thus shifted naturally AAE and SAE.⁷ Following the tradition of Labov's (1968) sociolinguistic interview, I asked the participants to respond to "danger of death" and "happiest moments" questions. Participants also discussed hip hop, their educational and career

⁷ This, of course, does not deny the definite, yet in this case unexploited, benefits to investigating the three participants' speech in a variety of contexts (Hymes 1979, Labov 1966). Unfortunately, the author can only claim to have conducted informal observations (non-audiotaped) of the participants' speech in various social contexts. The claims of this paper must no doubt be weighed against this limitation.

plans, the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles, and initiated other topics as well. The interviews ranged from 40-50 minutes.

7. Quantitative Analysis

Given the current focus on the speakers' use of AAE grammar, the methodology used to tabulate copula contraction and deletion likewise reflects a more neutral formula, Straight Deletion and Contraction (cf. Rickford et al. 1991), rather than Labovian or Romaine formulas which have been employed in previous investigations of AAE's relation to African-based creoles and European based languages. Table 1 provides the participants' percentages of copula contraction and deletion according to the grammatical environments employed by Winford (1992), Rickford et al. (1991), Baugh (1980), and Labov (1969b; 1972b).⁸ Note that Negative (___Neg) and Miscellaneous (___Miscel.) categories have been added in order to account for contracted and/or deleted copulas that occurred before *not* and ambiguous environments, respectively.

Of the three speakers, Ron displays the greatest percentage of copula deletions (.31), though his percentage of copula contractions (.29) are nearly identical to his deletions. In contrast, Greg and Mike have greater percentages of copula contraction (.43 and .64 respectively) than they do absence (.02 and .03 respectively). Across the board, both contraction and deletion are favored when a vowel constitutes the preceding phonological environment. Labov (1969; 1972) and Baugh (1980)

⁸ Following Rickford et al (1991), cases analyzed for copula variation included present forms of *is* and *are*, since *am* occurs in full or contracted form 99% of the time. Other Don't Count (DC) cases included nonfinite and past forms of the copula, as in (She will *be* here and She *was* here.) Additionally, tokens of the contracted *is* followed by a sibilant (He Ø sick) were not counted since such sentences are phonetically difficult to distinguish from deletion and contraction in rapid speech. Copulas in exposed (i.e. clause final) and stressed positions were also not counted. Ron's DC cases totaled 291, Mike's DC cases totaled 294, and Greg's totaled 283. A large part of each participants' DC cases included nonfinite and past forms of the copula, as well as copulas in stressed and exposed positions.

found copula deletion to be favored in the following grammatical environments (ordered from least to greatest): ___NP, ___AdjP, ___Loc, ___Ving, ___Gonna. With Ron, both contraction and deletion seemed to be most favored in ___Ving environments. Given the small number of tokens overall, it is questionable whether this slight deviation from Labov's findings is substantial enough to warrant an in-depth discussion. Contraction, though, is least favored in ___Loc environments while deletion is least favored in ___AdjP contexts. In Mike's case, contraction is most favored in ___Gon(na) (.38) and ___AdjP (.25) contexts. Mike's contraction in ___Ving environments only represent 14% of his total percentage of contractions. Ron's use of copula contraction is most strongly favored in ___AdjP environments, with ___Gon(na) environments ranking second.

For all three speakers, both contraction and deletion overwhelmingly follow personal pronouns (he, she, we and they). In the Person-Number category, there is greater variation among the three participants. For Ron, contraction of *is* and *are* occur at almost equal rates (.43 and .57 respectively). However, *are* constitutes the majority of Ron's deletion cases; they constitute 95% of the total number of deleted tokens. Mike's contractions of *are* represent 78% of the total number of contractions, while his *is* contractions only constitute 22%. His three cases of copula deletion involve the plural/2nd singular auxiliary. Finally, in Greg's case, *are* is contracted at a rate of .62, while *is* contractions occur at a lower rate of .38. Greg's two cases of copula deletion involve the plural/2nd singular auxiliary.

In addition to copula deletion, an analysis was also conducted of the speakers' use of the habitual *be*, non SAE tense constructions, *stressed* and *unstressed been*, verbal -s, ed deletion, double negatives, /d/ and /t/ substitution for /θ/, /ŋ/ reduction to /ɪn/, and /ay/ reduction to /ə/. None of the speakers employed *done* or the habitual *be*, though Mike used the future *be* in "I be driving down the freeway talking about WHY why did you do this to me!?" Ron displayed 11 cases of non SAE tense constructions, in contrast to Greg's display of two, and Mike's lack thereof. The use of the *unstressed been* occurred in Ron's speech four times, Mike's speech 3 times, and Greg's speech twice. Ron displayed

Table 1: Copula Variation Across Three Speakers

	RON (Anglo American)		MIKE (African American)		GREG (African American)	
	SC*	SD**	SC	SD	SC	SD
Preceding phonological Env.						
Consonant	.05	-	-	-	.02	-
Vowel	.95	1.00	1.00	1.00	.98	1.00
Following Grammatical Env.						
NP	-	-	.03	-	-	-
AdjP	.07	.05	.25	-	.32	-
Loc	.05	.02	.06	-	.12	-
Ving	.27	.17	.38	-	.22	-
Gou(na)	-	.10	.14	.03	.13	-
Neg.	.10	.07	.02	.02	.12	-
Miscel.	.02	-	.06	-	.05	-
Subject						
Personal Pronoun	.85	.95	1.00	1.00	.82	1.00
Other Pronoun	.10	-	-	-	.15	-
Noun Pronoun	.05	.05	-	-	.03	-
Person-Number						
Plural/2nd Singular	.57	.95	.78	1.00	.62	1.00
3rd Singular	.43	.05	.22	-	.38	-
Overall Percentage	.31	.29	.43	.02	.64	.03
Total # of Tokens	41	41	63	63	41	41

* Straight Contraction, ** Straight Deletion

C=contraction, D=deletion, F=full

Straight Contraction $\frac{C}{F+C+D}$ Straight/Romaine Deletion $\frac{D}{F+C+D}$

four cases of verbal -s and Greg displayed one case. Ron provided 7 cases of double negatives, all of which carried emphatic weight. Mike's single use of the double negative is also thought to have been used for emphatic purposes. At the level of phonology, Ron verbalized /th/, /η/, and both /y/ and /er/ at a rate of 76%, 61%, and 53% respectively. Mike and Greg verbalized these variables at relatively higher rates.

Labov (1969b) has argued that AAE contraction and deletion show qualitative parallels and as such, it is not surprising that they are quantitatively parallel as well. Ron's contractions and deletions respond in parallel ways to following grammatical environment accordingly deem him an "authentic" AAE speaker. Greg and Mike, however, show very few quantitative parallels in their (relatively low) percentage of contractions and deletions. Following Labov (1972a), these speakers qualify as "lames" or marginal AAE speakers. Yet, to more fully appreciate the repertoire of social identities enacted through each participants' speech, (Kroskrity 1993), a discourse analysis of select speech samples is offered below.

8. Qualitative Analysis

Transcript 1 is an excerpt from two hours of Ron's speech that is marked by grammatical, phonological, and prosodic AAE features.⁹

Transcript 1: Ron Excerpt (NOTE: *Bold words and phrases represent an orthographic rather than phonetic representation of Ron's speech.*)

- 1 Lanita: Do you think it's going to blow up again?
- 2 Ron: Maybe not dis year. It'll definitely blow up again I mean
- 3 because like I said, without *real* changes, without *real*
- 4 *transformation* (.1) not just change but *tra:nsformation*

⁹ The majority of the interviewers' minimal responses to Ron's talk have been removed in efforts to focus more exclusively on Ron's use of AAE grammar and phonology.

5 (1) um the same things'll happen (.1) okay (.) you know
 6 (.) it's like (.1) and (4) see ↑dis recession isn't en:ding (1)
 7 okay (.) it's *not* (.) *gonna* (.) *end* because what you've
 8 ha:d with deregulation (.1) is (1) the really the *illu:sion*
 9 (.1) of a recession <now it's real for us who feel it (1) but
 10 the people that are the chairmans of the boards of
 11 Chrysler Corporation (1) they're still making *to::ns* of
 12 money off of *dis* (.1) What they've done is *mo:ved* *dere*
 13 factories outta *da* country (.) employ people at low wages
 14 and they don't *make* and *sell* automobiles anymore (1) so
 15 it *looks* like they're struggling with us (1) but what
 16 they're doing is they're making the parts and <selling em
 17 to other automobile industry> who are *selling* more cars
 18 <okay what you ha::ve is you have a transnationalism like
 19 *nevah* before okay (.) >there's no difference between
 20 there's no separation between Honda and Chrysler and
 21 GM< <GM's *makin'* the parts that Honda uses to sell its
 22 cars! (.) People buy Hondas because of their reputation so
 23 GM >ain't even selling cars no more they Ø just
 24 making the parts< (2)

25 Lanita: But you say that like that has somethin' to do with why

26 Ron: = <It has a lot to do [with the]

27 Lanita: [How so?]

28 Ron: = with the riot because what you have is you *wid wid da*
 29 rebellion, excu:se me but what you have is um (2) you
 30 know the one way that this could be diffused was if there
 31 was jobs you know (.) and people could see *rea:l* changes,
 32 *rea:l* transformations and but you Ø not gon have that *dis*
 33 recession you know <you have all these politicians
 34 talkin' about *we* need you know *our our* urban plans and
 35 agendas (.) Weed and Seed and this and *nat* (1) Bill
 36 Clinton has an urban agenda and an inner city you know
 37 economic agenda (1) but if *you* don—if what has happened
 38 is (.1) through deregulation (1.) there is no more better
 39 business practices (1) okay why Ø the companies gon
 40 stay here? It ain't about you know...

Ron's use of AAE is highly prosodic in nature. Ron employs rising and falling intonation, vowel lengthening, timing/rhythm, and high pitch (cf. Morgan 1996a) as he discusses the potential for future civil explosions in Los Angeles following the 1992 Rodney King verdict. Ron also uses collectivizing pronouns that align him with the residents of South Los Angeles.

Ron also uses several AAE grammatical features. Copula absence occurs three times, in line 24, 33, and 40-41 and coincides with Ron's emphasis on certain points, "They Ø just making the parts," "But you Ø not gon have that," and a question which draws the listener in, "Okay, why Ø the companies gon stay here?" There is also one case of a double negative, "GM *ain't* even selling cars *no* more", and one case illustrating non-SAE tense construction, "There *is* no more better business *practices*. In contrast, there is a relative abundance of /n/ and /d/ substitution for the voiced alveolar fricative /th/.¹⁰ Ron's limited use of AAE grammar and relatively high use of prosodic and phonological AAE features index an African American style which might likely key African American identity for survey listeners.

Ron's use of the African American prosodic system and his relatively limited use of AAE grammar here is not unlike his speech during our two interviews. In approximately two hours of speech, Ron liberally employs vowel lengthening, rhythm and tempo and high pitch yet very few grammatical tokens. Though space does not permit a lengthy delineation, it is significant that Ron also uses several African American lexical items (e.g., *ballin'* for basketball) and idiomatic expressions when telling a story, joke and while arguing a position.

In Transcript 2, Mike offers somewhat of an impromptu discussion of the 1992 civil unrest, as his exposition follows the interviewer's mere (yet emphatic) mention of the topic.

Transcript 2: Mike Excerpt (NOTE: Collectivizing pronouns have been bolded below.)

¹⁰ Many of these cases can be explained by their preceding phonological environments as in "What they've done is moved dere factories..." in line 12-13).

1 Lanita: ... U::m, the RECENT controversy in Los Angeles!

2 Mike: Now You Know (1.) I have heard this described in so many
 3 ways and I think the predominant term that everyone has
 4 chosen to use (.) especially the mass media (.) is civil
 5 unrest (2) I (.) don't (.) know (.) what (.) civil unrest
 6 means (1) I I have no identity to that term (1) This was
 7 clearly a riot (1) um and I think it is a riot that was the
 8 result of not just this *one* isolated incident of Rodney
 9 King (1) um I think this was a culmination of ye:ars of
 10 oppression um within our community (1) um and I think
 11 there was only so much that we could continue to take
 12 (.) as a group of people and as a community (1) and I
 13 think the Rodney King Inc-incident was definitely a
 14 catalyst but in no way caused the incident (1) I think it
 15 was a riot because there was a certain level of destruction
 16 associated with the entire set of occurrences that would
 17 make it a riot and >simply saying civil unrest to me is like
 18 this way of kinda making everything all right< (.) *We can*
 19 *put a band-aid on this* you know and *we can smooth out*
 20 *the wrinkles* and everything will be okay but in No Way
 21 In Hell is this gon be okay by just identifying this as an
 22 unrest (.) *We're gonna come in* (1) *we're gonna get a*
 23 *give a few teenagers some jobs um we're going to*
 24 *create* (1) *maybe a few more um access* (1) for some of
 25 us into the establishment but basically things would
 26 return will return to normal if WE meaning we as the
 27 younger generations don't decide hey, this is not going to
 28 occur again and if this means that we have to pull every
 29 black politician out of their current office (1) if that
 30 means that we have to pull all of *our* dollars out of white
 31 banks and start *our* own foundations (1) if that means that
 32 we have to invest solely in our own businesses so we
 33 shop within the black community then that's what it takes
 34 (1) um but in no way was this simply an unrest

In contrast to Ron, Mike's excerpt displays no cases of copula absence. Mike's most marked use of AAE occurs as line 21, "...but in No Way In Hell is this gon be okay by just identifying this as an

unrest" where the contraction of gonna to gon carries emphatic weight and coincides with his assertion that band-aid type remedies are insufficient. Mike uses SAE grammar and phonology throughout much of his interview. His use of timing/rhythm, stress and vowel lengthening mark an emphatic African American style of speech (Morgan 1996a). Mike also illustrates command of the African American discursive style of marking in lines 19-20. He states sarcastically, "*We can put a band-aid on this*"..., thus rendering a negative opinion about politicians with patchwork remedies for social inequality. Like Ron, Mike's use of personal and genitive pronouns [we, us, our] serve to index his membership within the African American community.

Greg's excerpt, presented in Transcript 3, displays perhaps the greatest use of SAE grammar and phonology of all three speakers. As such, this excerpt is not atypical of his speech during our 45 minute interview. Here, I may have actually negotiated the use of a formal register through the contextualized and slightly formal nature of my inquiry.

Transcript 3: Greg Excerpt (NOTE: Collectivizing pronouns have been bolded below.)

1 Lanita: I meant to ask you about um your feelings um regarding
 2 the rebellion Pat (a mutual friend of G & LJ) and I talked
 3 to a lot of um students at UCLA A lotta people were
 4 upset, um, and um some were just kinda nonchalant about
 5 the whole issue how did it affect you?
 6 Greg: U:m yeah upset would be an understatement in light of
 7 the fact that half **my neighborhood** was burned down
 8 um (1) How did I feel about it? To a certain degree I felt
 9 sorry for you know (.) all the people that that Koreans
 10 and so forth that got their their stores burned down <but I
 11 understood why it took place and I understood that it
 12 was also not just a bunch of opportunists (1) you know (.)
 13 tryna take advantage of that of uh current tensions (1)
 14 There were people that had systematically planned to go
 15 around and burn down burn out the Koreans should the
 16 decision come back as it did y-know (1) So it you know

- 17 the whole thing made sense (1) It wasn't bullshit but it
 18 made sense
- 19 Lanita: How did that um the verdict hit you initially?
- 20 Greg: (1) How did it hit me? U:h to a certain extent I expected
 21 it but it was a joke you know (1) it was a slap in the face
 22 then again we've been slapped so many times it uh you
 23 know it's gettin' I guess we're kinda numb at this point
 24 you know and /nen/ the watchakalit the new verdict I
 25 mean the new trial with these four /brothes/ that's gonna
 26 be another slap in the face cause they're gonna be found
 27 guilty

As illustrated in the excerpt, Greg often fully vocalizes /th/ and the only case where /th/→/n/ can easily be explained by the preceding phonological environment ("...and nen the watchakalit..." [line 24]). Greg's use of collectivizing pronouns, does the most work in marking his potential membership within the African American community by aligning him with the plight of the African American residents impacted by the Rodney King verdict. Indeed he notes that "half my neighborhood was burned down" (line 7) which situates him within the affected communities. His use of "brothas" (pronounced /brʌθs/) in line 25 also potentially signals his status as African American as this term is an in-group reference to an African American male.

9. Survey Analysis

Ninety two people listened to the above excerpts and then provided ethnic and class assessments of the three speakers. Previous studies indicate that listeners make interpretations about a speaker's ethnicity, class background, and even personality on the basis of voice cues alone (cf. Harms 1961; 1963, Buck 1968, Shuy et al. 1969, Tucker & Lambert 1969, DeStefano 1971, Koustaal & Jackson 1971, Giles & Bourhis 1976, Johnson & Buttny 1982, Linn & Piché 1982). The earliest of these studies were conducted in laboratory settings and elicited listener judgments on such polar characteristics as whether a speaker is mean or nice, an athlete or a

student, and white or black. As such, listeners seldom provided open-ended or extraneous responses that could yield deeper insight into their specific linguistic ideologies. In response to these perceived limitations, the current study involved face-to-face interviews in the survey participant's homes, college dormitories and campuses, and a variety of other social settings.

Survey respondents included university students and the interviewers' acquaintances, friends and family members. Respondents varied in terms of their age, gender, ethnic, geographical, and professional backgrounds. Survey respondents were asked, "What ethnicity do you think the speaker is," and in other cases, "Could the speaker pass as white speaking the way he does?" Survey participants also responded to the question, "What class background would you say the speaker is from (upper, middle, lower or any variation in between)?" Many respondents also speculated on the potential age, educational level, and the political orientation of the three speakers. Survey participants were encouraged to listen to both the sound and the content of the speech samples in making their assessments. Following their responses, the interviewer revealed the ethnic and class backgrounds of the three speakers, which often elicited insightful comments and questions about the three speakers, particularly Ron.

Survey administrators included two African American females and two white males, all college students.¹¹ Of the 92 survey respondents, 45 (49%) were African American, 33 (36%) were Anglo American, 8 (9%) were Latino, and 6 (7%) were Asian American. Males constitute 59% (54) of the entire sample, and females make up the remaining 41% (38). Additionally, the respondents ranged between 10-45 years in age, though the majority, 83%, were between 16-25 years old. Table 2 provides African American and Anglo Americans' assessments of the ethnicity and class background of Ron, Mike and Greg.¹²

¹¹ I am indebted to Jason Baker, Jason Schiffman and Jocelyn Henry for assisting in the collection of these surveys.

¹² The few times when survey participants questioned which attribute to weigh most heavily, they were admonished to consider sound first, and then content.

Table 2: Race & Class Assessments of Speakers

Race & Class Assessments	RON (Anglo American)	MIKE (African American)	GREG (African American)
AFRICAN AMER.	92%	92%	85%
<i>Low</i>	48%	1%	4%
<i>Low-Mid</i>	18%	1%	16%
<i>Mid</i>	22%	40%	49%
<i>Upper-Mid</i>	3%	30%	12%
<i>Upper</i>	1%	20%	3%
ANGLO AMER.	5%	7%	15%
<i>Low</i>	3%	1%	1%
<i>Low-Mid</i>	-	-	1%
<i>Mid</i>	1%	5%	13%
<i>Upper-Mid</i>	-	1%	-
<i>Upper</i>	-	-	-
UNSURE	3%	-	-

According to the linguistic analyses presented above, Ron appeared to be an "authentic" AAE speaker, while Mike and Greg's speech was more similar to SAE. In a manner commensurate with these findings, 92% of the survey respondents classified Ron as African American. Only two respondents assessed Ron as white and another two respondents were undecided.¹³ However, though a linguistic analysis of Mike's

¹³ One African American (female) who classified Ron as white and middle class commented, "He's slipping with his accent. You *know* when it's shaky!" This survey participant echoed the classic characterization of Ron, "He's a white boy tryna sound black."

speech placed him closer to SAE, 92% of people surveyed classified him as African American, while only 7% classify him as white. Greg, whose speech was thought to be the most closest to SAE of all three speakers, is classified as African American by 85% of the people surveyed. Greg was classified as white by 15% of the survey respondents. In terms of class rankings, Ron is perceived as lower class by 48% of survey respondents, while Mike is overwhelmingly considered to be middle to upper class (according to 90% of survey respondents). Sixty-four percent of the survey respondents considered Greg to be middle to upper-middle class, while 16% classified him as lower to lower-middle class.

9.1. Ron

Ron's use of an adolescent variety, marked most strongly by his use of African American prosody (i.e., rhythm and tempo and timing and pitch) and phonology, convinced many respondents that he was a lower to lower-middle class African American speaker. Fifteen respondents were quite adamant in their classifications, rendering assessments such as, "He's black!" and "He's *definitely* a brotha'!" Yet a substantial majority of the people who classified Ron as African American also found his speech over-performed to some extent. For example, several respondents stated that Ron sounded inauthentic, as if he was *trying* to sound intelligent or to sound white (Frazier 1957). Several others compared him pejoratively to the rapper and actor Ice-T and the parodied nonsensical inmate of the former popular television comedy, *In Living Color*.¹⁴ Additionally, two African American respondents assumed that Ron might be mixed with black and white, and *hence* ambivalent about his ethnic identity. For these respondents, Ron's alleged bi-racial identity triggered his alignment with a "militant" (Afro-centric) perspective and

¹⁴ Of several respondents who laughed immediately upon hearing Ron's voice, one joked, 'Dude got lyrics!' and another comments, 'He sound like Ice T, but he can back up his words.' Ironically, though, Ice T is from a middle class background who is a successful rap artist because of his use of AAE.

(over)performance of AAE. This findings resemble Dillard (1977) and Baugh's (1987; 1992) research on hypocorrection among middle and upper middle class African Americans. Others survey participants commented that Ron sounded southern or "country," which Mitchell-Kernan (1969) describes as a term which is constructed in opposition to "proper" or "good" English (cf. Lawrence 1977). Those respondents who described Ron middle to upper class and African American (26%) often did so on the basis that Ron "sounded educated."

What are we to make of the Ron's overwhelming classification as an African American and respondents qualified suspicions? Part of the reason why survey assessments of Ron are contextually ambivalent is that he employs an adolescent African American variety that is replete with prosodic and phonological markers to argue, in my opinion rather cogently, a liberal position with respect to improving economic and social conditions for African Americans. In this sense, Ron comes off to listeners as educated, yet his speech variety serves as a point of contention. In essence, Ron's speech variety serves to marginalize his status within the AASC.

Further, Ron's identity as constructed for listeners through his excerpt does not mesh well with conceptions of middle class speakers within the African American community. As Since socioeconomic class is more often determined in the AASC by an individual's real or perceived educational status versus income (Morgan 1994a), Ron's message serves to signal his status as an educated speaker. Yet the adolescent speech variety Ron employs is stigmatized and as such, compels listeners to classify his as either lower-class or to align him, in a linguistic and metaphorical sense, with the black middle and upper class college students who tended to hypocorrect or over-perform AAE. For many, Ron's stereotypical use of black affect is most convincing in marking him as lower-class African American. For others, Ron's message content is suspiciously awkward as to suggest that he may be bi-racial (which for some respondents meant confused about his ethnic identity) or a militant African American who felt the need to perform his identity by speaking a stereotyped variety of AAE.

When Ron was assessed as white, as he was by an African American, Asian American, and two Anglo Americans, a

respondent commented that his speech was a bit "shaky" and two respondents speculated that Ron was a lower class white male who was socialized in a black environment. Of the two respondents (African American and Anglo American) who were undecided about Ron's potential ethnic identity, one alleged, "He [Ron] could be anything because he's trying too hard." This comment also seems to characterize the sentiments of those who classified Ron as African American but still felt his speech was inauthentic in some way (e.g., some felt Ron's speech was over-performed, rambled, etc.)

9.2. Greg

Greg's relatively limited use of AAE grammar, phonology and prosody served, for many African American respondents, to signify his lack of racial consciousness. Thus, Greg was characterized several times as an African American who was estranged from the black community, despite the fact that Greg begins his excerpt by placing himself within the African American communities which were burned during the 1992 civil disturbances and uses genitive pronouns "we" and "us" when referring to African American residents. African Americans, as well as an Anglo American respondent, who identified Greg as African American assessed Greg as a "wimp," "black but he's a nerd," "white-washed," and accused him of "talking white."¹⁵ The

¹⁵ Interestingly, this accusation is one which Greg discussed in our interview. Having been accused of "talking white" by several women at clubs, Greg was compelled to shift his discursive strategies away from more "educated" speech to what he called, "ghetto gear." In the following story about his experiences at a club, Greg comments on his conscious situational codeshift to an African American style of speech and his strong disdain for being accused of talking white: "... *If you plan on getting out on the dance floor, you have to use common sense and you have to communicate with the person that you're talking to. You .. talk to someone that's ghetto in a certain way, you're not communicating cause the communication process is not taking place because they can't relate to that. I had someone tell me .. I came I was kickin it I was really in ghetto mode one night and I was kickin it. I had a toothpick in my mouth ... I was*

African, Asian and Anglo Americans who classified Greg as white and middle class often attributed it to the fact that he sounded educated and used big words. When Asians and Anglo Americans classified Greg as black and middle class, many commented that he sounded educated or eloquent.

9.3. Mike

Mike was predominantly classified as African American and middle to upper class. Many respondents commented that he was very well spoken and used "good words." In his excerpt, Mike verbalizes his preference of the term "riot" over "civil unrest," takes an assertive stance against politicians, and then calls for community action. His problem-solution based exposition impressed several African American, Asian, and Anglo respondents to give him a middle to upper class rating. Many of these respondents felt that both his use of language and the maturity of his ideas reflected a certain class background. In two cases, however, Mike's preference for the term riot aroused negative feedback from AAE speakers who considered him to hold little affinity to the African American community. In two other cases, Mike was initially thought to be white. Yet, as survey respondents continued to listen to the *content* of his speech, they reclassified him as African American. Additionally, some African Americans who identified Mike as African American and middle to upper class also remarked that he sounded "white washed," "militant as though he was mixed with black and white," and

in that frame of mind so I had in toothpick in my mouth kickin back um .. I was talking to some woman in the club and she ... had the nerve to call me white and I was thinking What! White. Now I happened to be in (name of club) and I forgot where I was and I was talking to her like I'm talking to you as opposed to talking to her like I'm talking to a (name of club)-woman. So she kind've assumed oh well he must be a oreo, why is he talking to me so proper? So white. So you know you have to be aware of that because you call me white and I'm pissed off because I'm very far from being white ... So I don't think I don't really appreciate that comment you know. I didn't appreciate it at the time so you know .. and because I don't like to get comments like that, I try to avoid talking to certain people in a certain way.

speculated that he interacted regularly with Anglo Americans. Overwhelmingly, Anglo Americans provided positive assessments in their classifications of Mike as African American and middle to upper class. Of the nine Anglo respondents who provided comments, six commented that his speech was "eloquent" and that Mike was "obviously intelligent" and one stated that Mike reminded them of the basketball player Scotty Pippen. Mike was assessed as Anglo American by three African American, three Anglo-American and one Latino respondent. Of the two African Americans who provided comments, one was initially undecided, but stuck with an Anglo American classification and the other remarked that he was "more articulate."

10. Summary

These findings challenge traditional descriptions of AAE speakers as either "lames" (Labov 1972a) or authentic speakers (cf. Labov 1980). Though linguistic and discourse analyses present Ron as an authentic AAE speaker, survey responses reveal his marginalized status in the AASC. Additionally, while Mike is considered to be a marginal AAE speaker by linguistic standards, he is by and large considered to a competent AAE speaker by survey respondents and through discourse analysis.

Butters (1994) argues that because AAE speakers, particularly non-adolescents, tend not to exploit the entire range of grammatical features of AAE in their speech at any one time, linguistic descriptions of speakers can easily end up producing "lame" AAE speakers at best or, as Ron illustrates, present speakers of an adolescent AAE variety as "authentic." Yet, as Morgan (1994a) argues, though AAE is symbolic of ethnic loyalty and pride for many African Americans, this does not preclude their appreciation nor use of SAE. In fact, the ability to speak SAE is viewed within the AASC as a way to negotiate one's economic success in a society which continues to marginalize African American discourse styles. It is only when SAE is the only code used by African American speakers that their status within the AASC risks marginalization. Likewise, Greg, whose speech was shown via linguistic and discourse analysis to be most closest to

SAE, is seen by many African American respondents as having a low sense of racial consciousness—despite his expressed membership and alignment with the African American community.

These findings also implicate the politics of language, identity and (linguistic) ideology for members the AASC. After survey respondents discovered the Ron was white and from a middle class background, many were extremely critical of him. For many African American critics, the fault lay within his [and other white speakers' of AAE] failure to acknowledge the privilege associated with such linguistic *ethnic options* (cf. Waters 1990). For example, several respondents noted that, unlike themselves, Ron could switch to white (begin speaking SAE) at anytime and enjoy the privileges thus associated (cf. Royce 1982, Woolard 1988, Waters 1990, Kroskrity 1993).

11. Conclusion

In replicating Hatala (1976) and Labov's (1980) assessment of Carla, this paper has critiqued notions of an "authentic" African American speaker and speech community which are based primarily upon linguistic analyses. In exploring both the speech behavior of Ron and listeners' assessments of Ron, this paper has exposed the inadequacy of linguistic models that associate "authenticity" with an adolescent speech variety. Similarly, Mike's speech behavior and listeners' assessments of Mike serve to problematize the use of "lame" to describe AAE speakers who do not use adolescent varieties across a variety of social contexts. Listener responses which were antagonistic of Greg's primary use of SAE indirectly indicate the role of AAE as a symbol of racial and cultural consciousness for members of the AASC. Thus, in addressing the questions of *Who speaks AAE?* and *What does it mean to speak AAE?*, this paper has advocated the utility of quantitative and qualitative forms of analyses to describe the linguistic and social complexity characterizing AAE speakers and the AASC.

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