

## **AMERICAN TONGUES**

Transcript  
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### BLACK WOMAN FROM GEORGIA:

In my earlier life I did quite a bit of traveling because my husband was a contractor and moving different places people would ask me what part of the South I was from. And of course at first it was a little annoying and then it became a game with me - I would let them guess. And they never could. The same thing my weight. I just let them guess and they never can.

### VIRGINIA MAN:

Mary had a little lamb its feet was white as snow everywhere that me and Mary went, that lamb was sure to go.

### PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH WOMAN:

Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow and everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go.

### MISSISSIPPI TWINS, AGE 70:

Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow and everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go.

### NEW YORK BLACK BOY:

Mary had a little lamb, her feet was white as snow.

### NEW YORK WHITE WOMAN:

And everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go.

### ELDERLY WHITE WOMAN, GEORGIA:

He followed her to school one day, which was against the rules, it made the children laugh and play to see a lamb at school.

{CREDITS}

### BILLIE HOLLIDAY SONG (ASSORTED VISUALS):

You say either and I say either

You say neither and I say neither  
Either, either, neither, neither  
Let's call the whole thing off  
You like potatoes and I like potatoes  
You like tomatoes and I like tomatoes  
--You've got a lot of cotton in that country  
-A lot of cotton, peanuts, and potatoes  
-Um hum. You ever worked a cotton patch  
Oh, when I was a little bitty kid I used to go on up with my little tote  
Sack and pick it off the ground.  
-You know your face is getting longer?  
(Back to the song)

BOSTON MEN:

Is that where Page lives?  
-No, that's Gino's building.  
-Oh Gino.  
-I guess they're putting new windows in there.  
-New windows, I can use more windows in my apartment.  
-Winter windows, storm windows.  
-There's Junior.  
-Junior, what'd you do, you buy new curtains. Putting up new curtains?

BLACK NEW ORLEANS TEENAGERS:

--Yes. Indeed. You been to the World's Fair yet?  
I went to the Patty LaBelle and Bobby Womack concert, I was on the floor...  
-Girl, yeah  
-Clownin'  
--Girl, yeah, hoopin' at the concert.  
-You ride on that gondola? No, indeed, that's too scary!  
Girl, I wasn't riding on that thing  
Did you go to the kitty wash?  
Girl, yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

Who do you think has a funny accent?

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH WOMAN:

People from New York or Philadelphia, and Virginia especially, our grandkids in Virginia and they have that Virginia dialect, you know, I have to listen twice to catch on, you know, they've got that dialect, you know.

CLEVELAND WOMAN:

Wisconsin people.

INTERVIEWER:

Why do you say Wisconsin? What do they sound like?

CLEVELAND WOMAN:

'Cause when they say their o's they're going – out, out and about. They do, they're really bad. They sound like they're Norwegian.

BOSTON MAN:

Mississippi and Georgia. They have a certain way of talkin' that ah, boy, you have to have a knife to cut it, like I'm tryin' to cut butter. They would ah, couldn't understand 'em.

GEORGIA WOMAN:

People from Chicago, people from New York, upstate New York and all that. All of them have a definite accent. And they're the ones that are hard to understand. They may think I'm hard to understand.

NARRATOR:

New Yorkers are rude, Southerners talk too slow, New Englanders don't say much at all. We've all heard the old cliches. People have many ways of talking in the United States. And no matter who's doing the talking somebody or other has an opinion about it. After all it's one of the most important ways we size each other up.

BLACK PHILADELPHIA MAN:

It's like a vibration thing, you know, it's not too much what they say out of their mouth as how they say it, you know, 'cause you know you can meet a person for the first time and automatically draw an opinion. I'm not gonna like him, we're not gonna get along together. And you don't know him from Adam or Eve, just from what he has said and how he has said it out of his mouth.

NARRATOR:

When someone expresses an opinion about the way somebody else talks he may be making a judgment about more than just their speech.

WHITE MISSISSIPPI MAN:

I think you see more change in the way the Blacks talk than you do the way the Whites talk because some of this yackety-yack junk that they do an just go on and on and on and when they get through when it all boils down they just say “good morning” but yet they’ll talk fifteen minutes on that that same thing.

NARRATOR:

And since your speech is so much a part of who you are, if someone criticizes the way you talk, you might feel they’re criticizing you.

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH WOMAN:

Well they call me “Dutchified”.

INTERVIEWER:

Does that get you upset?

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH WOMAN:

Well, in a way, because they get people on television, you know, like you watch these programs, they’re from a different country, well, I can tell they’re from a different country, but I wouldn’t make fun of them because they talk the way they do and you accept them like that, don’t you? I do. But why make fun of me because I sound Dutchified, you’re dumb, just as soon as it’s Dutchified or German, you’re dumb.

NARRATOR:

When people put down the way others speak, they sometimes forget that everybody speaks with an accent, so before you jump to conclusions, consider the many ways of talking Americans have and remember that what sounds funny or odd to one person is music to the ears of another.

TEXAS STUDENT:

Sweet Phoebe, do not scorn me, do not Phoebe, say that you love me not but say not so in bitterness, the common executioner whose heart the accustomed sight of death makes hard. Oh, dear Phoebe, if ever as it ever may be near you meet some fresh cheek the power of fancy than shall you know the rules invisible that love’s keen arrows make.

COMPUTER MAN:

A program from your diskette head or hard drives. There are two ways you can shut down a hard drive. If your hard drive has an automatic feature simply by turning off the power switch of the

computer will actually bring the heads up off the platters and bring them back down past track zero, so that if there is any jostling of the computer after shutdown the heads will not erase any of the data on the platter. Of course, they'll go to the server in turn, but they are sent down with 128 k bytes of information, down a packet with a start and a stop mechanism for collision detection. It will drop off the bits when it gets to the destination and go straight DMA access into the system.

HYMN SINGERS:

Start looking for me when you reach Heaven, keep looking for me, I'll be there...

NARRATOR:

It's hard to say how many varieties of English there are in the United States. It depends on how you want to cut the pie. A particular accent may be spoken by only a few hundred people, you can hear some of the most unusual varieties in remote mountain areas or on islands along the East Coast. The speech heard in some of these places may sound very old-fashioned to outsiders.

TANGIERMAN:

Jackie Ham came in here one night. That kid drove his mom out. He said, "I had to get out of the house – Mom's been hollerin' and cussin' at me all day." She was behind the counter; she said, "It's a lie, Jack!" He said, "Who's that, Mom?"

OLD MAN:

First permanent settlement, white settlement on the island was in 1686. There have been people living here ever since. Nearly about all of us that were born here on this island we can say that our parents were born here and our grandparents and our great-grandparents and our great-great-grandparents and right on down.

MINISTER:

What amazes me is that I can be about almost anywhere, I can be in the mall in Salisbury, Maryland, for example, and I can hear a Tangierman talking in the crowd, and I can immediately tell they're from home, you know.

FISHERMAN:

It used to be like Claude and them said could you follow the crabs right on down, now they don't, they don't do that no more. I think they get on top of the water and swim when they get ready to leave. Swim over top of the pots instead of in 'em.

FISHERMAN #2:

Ain't no pots there, where they're at.

–Where's they at?

Just outside of the mud, ain't no pots there.

–They ain't going no further, these crabs goin' out.

OLD MAN:

If we're talking among ourselves, we might fall into the pattern of years ago and use the words that you're not used to, that you haven't heard. But it's, it's just about gone now, we talk just like everybody else. I figure I sound just like Walter Cronkite.

NARRATOR:

American dialects came from the speech of the first English settlers who brought with them the accents of their regions. The folks from the London area who settled in Virginia and Massachusetts spoke a different way from the folks from Northern England who made their home in Philadelphia. As the population spread out, these groups and others interacted mixing with on-English speaking settlers to create a patchwork of American accents, each blending gradually into the next. As you go East or West it becomes harder to hear the differences between accents. In the wide open spaces out West, Southern and Northern accents mixed so you don't find as many distinctions.

ROGER SHUY, SOCIOLINGUIST:

Sometimes the settlers were stopped by natural boundaries or barriers such as mountain range or a river and of course, since they were stopped, their dialect stopped, too. For example, the Connecticut River to this day separates "Pahk your cah" from "Park your car". Human interaction, the way people talk to each other, or don't talk to each other. The way they copy each other. It's always changing and because we, as people change, so do our dialects.

NARRATOR:

It isn't just that we speak differently. Take a trip across the United States today and you begin to notice something else about the way Americans talk. Our speech reveals how we deal with the world. Whether we beat around the bush or get straight to the point. The more you listen, the more you realize how our ways of speaking relate to how we live our lives.

RADIO HOST:

Good morning and welcome to the "Marketplace" program on this Tuesday morning. I'm Ricky Campbell with you. "Good Morning, Marketplace."

CALLER #1:

Hello, I have a wringer Maytag washer I'd like to sell and I want \$125 fer it.

CALLER #2:

I've got a General electric Frigidaire. It's a real good one for sale and I've got a nice five year old saddle horse.

CALLER #3:

This is me again, Ricky. I forgot to put my mustard greens. I've got plenty of mustard greens, if anyone wants it.

KENTUCKY MAN:

No, I just don't like Buckeyes, or you know, Detroit or stuff like that I don't talk Southern, but I, I'm just a plain ole hillbilly.

KENTUCKY MAN #2:

You can tell people from this part of Kentucky from anywhere else in the world, or I can, you know, if you really listen to it. I thought this is the way everybody talked 'til I went in the Navy and everybody talked funny to me, and the I got to realizing that it was me that was different then the rest of 'em.

YOUNG WOMAN:

How much these run?

BOOTSELLER:

Forty.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Forty.

BOOTSELLER:

These will all be in the boxes, now, they'll run from thirty to forty dollars.

OLD LADY:

How much you say you want for these dresses?

CRATIS WILLIAM, FOLKLORIST:

The subtle, cultural overtones of this dialect remain among Appalachian people. It's, it's culture expressing itself in sound and it involves rhythms, pause, tonal qualities, and so forth. They, themselves could not articulate it or identify it, but it's there. You hear it as an outsider.

YOUNG WOMAN:

These look like they'd fit him.

BOOTSELLER:

Because, this, this pointed toe, you've got to have a half a size, you need a half a size larger, see. Now, if you was buying something lie this right here in the square-toed, he might wear it in 8 1/2.

CRATIS WILLIAM, FOLKLORIST:

There's a strong emphasis in Appalachia upon the integrity of the individual. This means then, that one talks far around a subject before he hits it.

OLD MAN:

Hey, hey, how you feel? You feel pretty good?

POLITICIAN:

I feel good, a little tired, we've been campaigning a lot, we've been out on the trail for the last few months.

OLD MAN:

That's where it counts.

CRATIS WILLIAM, FOLKLORIST:

I want you to sign a personal note for me, let's say. I go and we interact socially. We might sit on our heels and whittle and pick our teeth with grass stems and tell stories for half an hour before I finally let it be known that I have come to have you sign this note for me. This is typical of the way we interact among ourselves. I think it still is.

BOOTSELLER:

I do 'ppreciate it.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Now, I can bring these back, if they don't fit?



BOOTSELLER:

Absolutely.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Alright.

OHIO MAN:

We seem to be here – the median and everybody else seems to be either above or below. When they say Midwest to me it means middle everything. It's mid-level. If you want to find the basic America or the yardstick, it's kinda right in here. We're straight American. We're bland. You know, we're just the normal stuff right here. Right out of the dictionary. No accents, no colloquialisms, you know, no uniqueness, just kinda straight English.

OHIO MAN AT BREAKFAST:

They say the Republicans got all the money, but the Democrats are doin' all the goddamn advertising. You know, every Democrat that's runnin' for city council or whatever is in the goddamn football bulletin and there isn't a Republican face. Look at it.

OHIO MAN #2:

Well, they don't have the money. They don't have the money to get the ads.

OHIO MAN COMMENTING:

We're always in here. There's a gang of us always in about 7:30 every morning.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you talk about?

OHIO MAN:

Everything. Boy, I'll tell you, we, we if there's a conversation, we got it. It isn't always good, but we always got a conversation or something.

MIKE HARDEN, COLUMNIST:

There's occasionally that sense that when you mention Columbus, Ohio or say Ohio, they immediately presume you're talking to them from the phone extension in the hog barn. Well, those of us who live in the central part of this state, you know, we'll say, no, we don't talk funny in Columbus, but if you want to hear funny, you know, go about 70 miles due South. And I'm

sure there's this gnawing suspicion that they're saying the same thing up in Cleveland about us.

(TEXAS)

COWBOY:

Well, you know how it is. I think the Texans are pretty obvious to tell, I guess.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think the most obvious thing about the Texans?

COWBOY:

They way they talk.

A.C. GREENE, HISTORIAN:

I think that most Westerners in their speaking feel like they're being more open, more forthright, more trustworthy. I think that Westerners feel about their speech sorts the way they do about their social rules and things, you know. You're not, you're not supposed to hide anything and I know that's true of Texans.

COWBOY #1:

I want to tell you what you need to do about your cow dogs.

COWBOY #2:

Oh yeah.

COWBOY #1:

Well, you stand near that pole. Lemme tell you them cow dogs, cow dogs 'spose to work behind the cow and these work right in front.

COWBOY #2:

They're stupid.

COWBOY #1:

Did you train 'em?

COWBOY #2:

I trained 'em. I'm stupid.

A.C. GREENE, HISTORIAN:

Another thing about Texas, you very seldom will encounter that Maine approach, Yah or Nah. They' ' bend your ear. In fact, I've seen it happen more than just a dozen or two times. I've seen it happen with rather constant frequency. You're driving down a little country road and here are two pick-up trucks and there are two guys that, that see each other at least once a day, but they're talking there and you pull up in front or behind and you got to give 'em a little time to break off their conversation and sometimes they'll pull out and let you by and you look in your rearview mirror and they're back to talking again, see.

COWBOY #1:

John henry, you a dog trainer. You need to everyday train those dogs. It's just like going to a football game, if the coach hadn't coached 'em, before he got to the game, ain't no need to try ta coach 'em after you get there.

(SECOND FACTOID)

CAJUN MAN:

If I do anything I'd jump the broomstick. And I don't want any spring chicken, either. I want an ol' settin' hen that can cook.

(FRENCH DIALOGUE)

CAJUN WOMAN:

He want to know what I cooked for supper. I tell him nuthin'.

(FRENCH DIALOGUE)

CAJUN WOMAN:

He asked me what bed I'm gonna sleep in tonight. I tell 'em me in the back bed and him in the front bed.

CAJUN MAN:

Is that nice?

(WORDS)

DELI MAN #1:

So what do you think about those New York Mets?

DELI MAN #2:

They're the best. I love them.

DELI MAN #1:

Did you watch the games?

DELI MAN #2:

Every game, every night until 12 o'clock at night.

DELI MAN #1:

No wonder you were sleepy all day at work.

NARRATOR:

When you think about the way someone from another part of the country talks, one thing that strikes you are the words that they use.

TEXAS WOMAN:

Do y'all have chicken fried steak? I would like chicken fried steak, hush puppies on the side, cream gravy and an ice tea, please.

DELI MAN #2:

What's that?

DELI MAN #1:

This hush puppies. This is a New York deli. If you want to nosh, if you wanna eat, you could schlep all over the world and you wouldn't find what we got here. How about a poppy smear?

DELI MAN #2:

How about a knish?

DELI MAN #1:

How about a kishka?

DELI MAN #2:

How about a nice bialy?

TEXAS WOMAN:

Hey, wait, wait. Time out, y'all. I don't understand a word you're saying.

NARRATOR:

Even though we all speak English, there are many words and expressions used in one place that might as well be Greek to people from somewhere else.

DELI MAN #1:

We're talking about the Mets, I think she's talkin' about the Vets.

RHODE ISLAND MAN:

This drink consists of syrup, ice cream, milk ans it's all mixed up and it turns out to be a very, very fine drink.

INTERVIEWER:

And it's a milkshake, right?

RHODE ISLAND MAN:

No, it's called a "cabinet." In this part of Rhode Island, it's called a "cabinet."

INTERVIEWER:

What is a "gumband?"

PITTSBURGH WOMAN:

It's a gumband. It's a thing like you wrap things up in. It stretches.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever hear another name for this?

PITTSBURGH WOMAN:

Rubber band? I think some people call it a rubber band? Not here, though.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm in Honolulu and it's quitting time. What do you say?

HAWAIIAN MAN:

Well, you would use the Hawaiian term that everybody knows which is "pau hana" – work is finished. And everybody knows that.

INTERVIEWER:

What about jambalaya?

LOUISIANA MAN:

Jambalaya? Oh, yeah, I know what is jambalaya, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What's that?

LOUISIANA MAN:

Jambalaya you mix that with meat, jambalaya rice, well-seasoned and you cook it – that's good jambalaya.

INTERVIEWER:

Anti-gogglin – Do you know what that means?

MISSISSIPPI TWINS:

Yeah, it's at a diagonal, skew, off from the perpendicular, we'll say.

MISSISSIPPI MAN:

Antigogglin meaning "non-square." Anything that's not square if it's sittin' squanch wise.

PENNSYLVANIA GIRL:

"Snickelfritz." That's a good one a snickelfritz, yeah. Snickelfritz, little kid would be a snickelfritz, you know a rowdy little kid, would be a snickelfritz.

INTERVIEWER:

What does “schlep” mean?

NEW YORK WOMAN:

Schlep means to carry, to lug, schlep around, to walk around. Everybody in New York, schleps. Everybody is carrying something. Everybody is schleping some place. We're all schleppers.

INTERVIEWER:

Since you've been exposed to some New Yorkers, do you know what that word is?

TEXAS MAN:

“Schelp?” No.

INTERVIEWER:

“Schelp” – oh – “schlep”--

INTERVIEWER #2:

What does that mean?

TEXAS MAN:

Did you sleep, what I think.

TEXAS MAN #2:

Shlip.

TEXAS MAN #3:

Slept last night in that room. (LAUGHTER)

NARRATOR:

Words do tell a lot about the people in a particular place. In the Southwest where the weather is always on everybody's mind, there are many expressions that describe rainstorms. Any kid from Oklahoma could tell you that. We learn the words we use in our regions the same way we learn our manners and customs – from the people around us.

LITTLE GIRLS:

Mamma, mamma, I'm so sick, call the doctor, quick, quick, quick,. Doctor, Doctor, will I die – count to five and you'll survive. One, two, three, four, five – I'm alive. Everybody learns to talk in the same way. At first they learn it in the home, from their families or the people who raise them.

FATHER:

What you doin' there, baby? What you doin' there, Sandy?

DAUGHTER:

Playin'. Playin' in the sand. She might want to play.

FATHER:

If you want to pick up some pecans, you pick 'em up over here. Don't pick 'em out in that dirt, no, put it in your mouth, germs and all that. Just pick them up over here and wipe 'em off with your clothes.

NARRATOR:

Once kids become old enough, they learn their language from their peers. The kids they play with. Kids the same age or those who are slightly older than them.

LITTLE KIDS:

Hurry up. Hurry up. Hurry up where I could get out of here. Hurry up! Hurry up! Hurry up!

WALT WOLFRAM, SOCIOLINGUIST:

As kids grow older, peer influence becomes even more important. Kids hear a lot of speech on t.v. they listen to a lot of teachers talk in school, but what's really important to them is the speech of the kids that they interact with on a day-to-day basis. As kids go on, they may learn another dialect, but in those unguarded moments, moments of anger and passion, it's the original dialect that has the most meaning for them.

WASHINGTON, DC WOMAN:

At times, I go back to my Southern dialect, you know, it's certain words I feel more comfortable and then there are other settings that I correct that.

INTERVIEWER:



When must you correct that?

WASHINGTON, DC WOMAN:

When I'm in my professional field, more so than anything and when I'm in my own social group and I'm more relaxed, my Southern dialect seems to come out a little bit more and I feel more relaxed, and then they begin to call me a Southern girl and that's my identity and I like that.

VOICE:

The number is 481.2500. If you need assistance, an operator will return.

INTERVIEWER:

Where have we heard your voice before?

RAMONA LENNY:

Well, does this sound familiar to you? The number is 732.7777. That's where you've heard it. I'm the voice of directory assistance throughout a good part of the country.

INTERVIEWER:

How did the actual taping session go?

RAMONA LENNY:

I was given a list of numbers from 0 to 9 to record with different inflections. For example, um, one, one, one, two, two, two. These numbers are thrown into a computer and depending on where you want the number in the sequence of a telephone number, the different inflection is used. So that it comes out something like this. The number is 000-2020. They were looking for generic speech. Or some people call it homogenized speech. Speech that would float in any part of the country and didn't sound like it came from somewhere in particular, perhaps the voice from nowhere.

(REGIONAL ATTITUDES)

BOSTON WOMAN:

I was engaged for awhile to a "Yalie" who sounded like a Yalie to me, although he had a trace of a Southern accent. I thought sort a Bill Faulkner, Truman Capote accent, you know, when you're twenty you don't, you know, make these distinctions and I went home to meet his family, ah, at Christmas. And as we drove further South from New Haven, his accent got heavier and heavier. It became filled with all these hillbilly kind of regionalisms, you know, this real kind of you all stuff and as well a lot of the hand gestures, this was, this man was becoming a different person as we went— mostly the language. By the time we got to Sparta, um, I had had it. I just knew that someone with those little accents was not gonna crawl around inside of me. I was not gonna have little Southern babies who talked like that and I got on a plane home. No question.

BOSTON MAN:

They can't talk Southern. I mean, Southern brogue is the worst. You know that for yourself, I mean you're laughin'.

INTERVIEWER:

Why is it worse?

BOSTON MAN:

Because they, they talk like Niggers. I'm sorry. Even the white people talk like Niggers over there.

NARRATOR:

People can be very blunt when they say what they think about the speech of a certain area. They may point up how people talk as proof of that they like or don't like about that part of the country.

MIKE HARDEN, COLUMNIST:

And, I was talking to a New York editor not too long ago and I could tell, you know, he was thinking, Ohio, okay, I learned about that in geography. It's somewhere near Iowa or Idaho or one of those places and you get the impressions that they think there's rampant brain death west of the Hudson. And you almost want to say, well I've got to go now because the cows are eating the seatcovers off the Massey-Ferguson and we've got some canning to do. So we tease back and we get very defensive. I say about New Yorkers that in Manhattan the reason there's that nasality in the language is because the higher up you go in those skyscrapers the thinner the air is – "he's in a meeting right now" and that's what happens.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN:

I don't think they perhaps have the same values of hospitality that we do in the South. And so I associate all of that with the sound of their voice. And it's um, grating on your ears, maybe our sound is also, but it's usually their nasal, um, and a lot of times the things they say are not kind.

GEORGIA WOMAN:

You know they won't say, "Oh, darlin', I'm so glad to see you." They'll say, "Nice to see you" just clip it right off. And you've got to put little adjectives and little darling, precious, something like that to make you a Southerner.

TENNESSEE MAN:

They laugh at me. I took an ice chest out at a wedding and I said, "I brought the ice." And these three guys said, "You brought the what?" and I said, "I brought the ice." And they said, "Well, we're not quite sure what you're saying and I opened up this ice chest and I said, "See, ice, asshole."

MOLLY IVINS, TEXAS COLUMNIST:

There's a lot more prejudice against a Southern accent than there is against any other kind. That is, and I think it troubled Jimmy Carter considerably because in the Northern mind a southern accent equals both ignorance and racism and you'll see that stereotype reinforced in zillions of old movies. You take all those old movies, around World War II era. I don't know how many zillions there were but the classic World War II movie consists of an "All-American" clean-cut hero who was from somewhere in the middle west. He's a farm kid from Kansas, who's blond and he's always got one wise-cracking buddy from New York and then there's always some just dumb, slow-talking Southerner who's the butt of all the jokes in the military movie. And that's a stock character in American movies and it really has reinforced the prejudice against the southern accent.

NARRATOR:

Regional stereotypes have been around for a long time. We often feel that we know an area, whether we've been there or not because of what we've seen in movies or on television or what we've read in books. When you hear people with strong regional accents. They tend to be the villains or comic characters.

DEAD END KIDS:

Hey, Mugs, get a load of that.  
Well, don't cover it up, that's the way I like to see it. My name first.  
Yeah that means you're the challenger.  
Just a natural-born point killer, ain't you?  
You know, my father once had his name on a thing like that.  
Yeah, wanted dead or alive - Reward 2 cents.

JUDY HOLLIDAY:

Well, I'll tell you what I would like. I'd like to learn how to talk good.

NARRATOR:

It's the nice guys and heroes, the well-educated and serious types who speak an accent close to standard English.

WILLIAM HOLDEN:

Well, I might give you a few books to start with and every now and then, I'll correct you, if you don't mind.

JUDY HOLLIDAY:

Go ahead.

WILLIAM HOLDEN:

Well, that is when I know. I don't talk so good myself.

JUDY HOLLIDAY:

You do.

MARLON BRANDO:

So what happens, eh gets the title shot outdoors in ballpark and what do I get a one-way ticket to Palookaville. You was my brother, Charlie, you should have looked out for me a little bit.

NARRATOR:

The other side of the stereotype is that a regional accent tacts a character as natural, real, the salt of the earth.

MARLON BRANDO:

You don't understand, I could have had class. I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody, instead of a bum. Which is what I am, let's face it.

NARRATOR:

From Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* regional accents have been used by writers to make their characters trustworthy.

ROCK HUDSON (thinking):

I don't know how long I can get away with this act, but she's sure worth a try.

ROCK HUDSON:

All those building filled with people. It kinda scares a country boy like me, you know it.

DORIS DAY (thinking):

Isn't that sweet? So unpretentious and honest.

(FOURTH FACTOID)

ROBERT KLEIN:

No, I love, I have in-laws in, I love Georgia very much. They talk in questions though: "last week I went to see my mother-in-law?" You know, are you talking to me or are you asking me if you went to see your mother-in-law? "And then we went to the Braves game?" Well, I don't know, did you go? With your mother-in-law? And then we went home and seen Stone Mountain? No? That's why they lost the Civil War. The troops couldn't understand the commands, you know, they were very equivocal. "Charge?"

(LANGUAGE CLASSES)

NEW YORK WOMAN:

So it's not them feeling superior. It's me feeling inferior. And I hate when I feel like that. And when I speak horribly, I feel very, I feel stupid and I don't have confidence in myself and it's holding me back, it's holding me back in a lot of things that I want to do. I want, you know, a good career and things like that and if you don't speak well, you can't.

WALT WOLFRAM, SOCIOLINGUIST:

Let's face it. There are certain consequences for not speaking a standard dialect. For example, people may make fun of you. Or you may have certain limitations in terms of the job market. So, if you don't want to deal with the negatives, it may be very helpful to learn a standard dialect for certain situations. It may not be fair, but that's the way it is.

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

You know, they kinda stereotype you -- what are you from Brooklyn? Yeah, I am from Brooklyn, but I don't like to, you know, remember it every day. I mean, it was a good place when I grew up, but automatically when they hear the Brooklyn accent, they think, like you grew up in the slum, hanging out on the corner and , you know, they get the wrong impression, which I guess, I like to make a good impression.

TEACHER:

Bearded dwarf.

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

Bearded dwarf.

TEACHER:

Fierce farmer.

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

Fierce farmer.

TEACHER:

Farmer.

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

Farmer.

DENNIS BECKER, THERAPIST:

Regional speech patterns are going to mark you as regional for the rest of your life and that's not what the corporate world is looking for.

TEACHER:

Yeah, R's are certainly missing and then some of medial r's are still missing...

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

I work for a dental company and we have really high tech type of equipment and I'm an outside sales rep and I would have to fill in at meetings all over the country. And they'd send me, I remember one time particularly, they sent me to Milwaukee, and they weren't even listening to what I was saying, and they, they were so, um, it sorta was like a comic act, comedian's act. They were kinda listening more to the way I was speaking than what I was saying. You know, and they'd say, where you from, and you know, where do you think I'm from – Texas?

DENNIS BECKER, THERAPIST:

Instantly, there's an ability to stereotype that person and worst of all, they get stereotyped in terms of ability to do things, like run a corporation, or take responsibility or meet the public, or give a good image. There's the feeling that anybody who talks like that can't be very smart. And if I don't talk like that, I must be smarter than you and I don't want anybody whose not very smart representing my company. And those kind of folks tend to have a hard time getting a job. O their speech is very, very important.

BROOKLYN WOMAN:

It is tough because when you're speaking one particular way, it's almost like a diet, you know, it's tough but you want it.

NARRATOR:

Few of us actually go so far as to try to change our accents, especially if we never have to move out of our home regions. But even within communities, accents vary enough to reveal something else about us. It's the thing that in a democracy isn't supposed to matter so much. Our social class.

(BOSTON)

WOMAN:

My name is Kathy Carangelo and I live in the North End of Boston. I've lived here all my life. I enjoy to travel. My latest trip was to St. Maarten and we took a little side trip to St. Bart's which was a beautiful island. It was only nine miles...

MAN:

I'm John Sears and Boston is home. I grew up in the Back Bay part and now live in Beacon Hill, but we're in the Fenway and the object behind me is Cyrus Dowland's "Appeal to the Great Spirit." That statue means a lot to me because it's a reminder ...

WOMAN:

My name is Sandy Hall and I am a resident of Boston. I come from a neighborhood called Dorchester and I'm interested in all types of sporting activities. Right now the Boston Red Sox are #1.

MAN:

My name is George McEvoy. I live and grew up in South Boston and now I live in Dorchester. I'm married. My wife is named Marge and I have two boys, George III...

NARRATOR:

Even in one place there are many accents. A stranger to Boston might think that everybody there says "pahk" and "cah" the same way. But one Bostonian can tell the neighborhood and the social and ethnic background of another Bostonian as soon as he opens his mouth. People make these distinctions whether they live in Portland, Maine or Portland, Oregon.

WALT WOLFRAM, SOCIOLINGUIST:

It's easy to figure out which dialects are most desirable and which dialects are less desirable, just look at which groups are more desirable and which groups are less desirable. E tend to think of urban as better than rural. We tend to think of middle class as better than working class. We tend to think of White as better than Black, so if you're a member of one these stigmatized groups then the way you talk will also be stigmatized. This goes on all over the United States. In every community.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #1:

There are those people who are professionals and then there are those people who are factory workers and they live in entirely different social circles.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #2:

And you've got three different ways of speaking. You've got a cultured way of speaking, you've got a "white trash", is that terrible expression?

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #1:

That's what, that's what w really think about.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #2:

And then you have the Black.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #1:

Not "white trash", let's say uneducated.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #2:

That's better, uneducated. There's a difference between uneducated white trash anyway.

MISSISSIPPI WOMAN #1:

You know, it's "I ain't got no" .. I've got to remember. "Let's don't let no stump knock no hole in the bottom of this here boat."

CINCINNATI WOMAN:

One of the things that having an accent does to us is make us have to be excellent. Once you've been in this city and realize how it works, how the social system works, you immediately realize that you have to be one cut above anybody you're competing with because the minute you open your mouth, you've got two strikes against you.



GIRLS FROM NEW ORLEANS:

I know how we talk, we kinda ah, I wouldn't necessarily say slur our words, but we don't, what is it enunciate, you know, pronounce our words. When I want to talk proper, I will. If there's somebody I have to impress or, you...

NARRATOR:

When you've heard enough people tell you what's wrong with the way you talk, you might begin to believe them.

GIRLS FROM NEW ORLEANS:

Yes, I do because it's ignorant. You know, it sounds ignorant... What the hell's comin' out that garbage out their damn mouth. That's it. That's gonna happen. They're gonna hear this and say look at them two beautiful girls, if they'd shut their mouths they'd be great.

--Oh, everybody tells us that. My girlfriend Rhoda tells us that.

--If you'd keep your mouth shut you'd be perfect.

--hear that nay, nay, nay

-- Ohmigod!

(FIFTH FACTOID)

BRAHMINS:

What else have they got to live for? Sex, probably. Well, undoubtedly sex, they keep that very quiet. But, I know you don't like Dickens.

BRAHMIN #2:

No, I don't like Dickens. Yes, he's post-Austen. Jane Austen, of course, is the greatest novelist in the English language..

BRAHMIN #1:

Well, she's a great novelist, but not the greatest.

BRAHMIN #2:

I'm a Dickens man.

BRAHMIN #1:

Well, Dickens is messy, George.

BRAHMIN #2:

Of course he's messy, but he's lively.

BRAHMIN #1:

He only wrote one great book which is *Pickwick Papers*.

BRAHMIN #1:

I would put that way down compared to *Bleak House*.

BRAHMIN #1:

I've been here for about 350 years. My family came over with the first load of bricks.

BRAHMIN #2:

I consider myself speaking the Brahmin dialect of Boston. But the word Brahmin is a very difficult word to define and it wasn't, in fact, invented by, until Oliver Wendell Holmes.

BRAHMIN #1:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think there are many people in Boston who speak like you two gentlemen?

BRAHMIN #2:

We're a dwindling... We're a declining group, but I think there may be as many as 1000.

–Out of 600,000.

–I often wonder...

(PHILIP CARANGELO)

FREDDY:

You tend to revel in the communication level you've come to experience. People in North End particularly as I say, revel in the fact that they speak a certain way. And if you speak some way other than that, they find you to be different. And I can't express it more than to say they really revel, they go further that they really should. In other words, to communicate with one another, they don't have to say cars, like you say, but they'll say it even more, just to emphasize the fact

that that's where they're from.

PHILLIP:

Julio, come here will you please for a minute. You look all "gagado" – what's the matter? Rough night, seriously? You make it to my party, Friday?

FREDDY:

What you'll find is a lot of us really express ourselves differently and if my brother Phillip was here, he has yet another way of expressing himself.

CATHY:

He'd probably be the best one.

INTERVIEWER:

Why?

CATHY:

He definitely has an accent. A Boston North End accent. The reason why Phillip has it so strong and emphasizes it and uses it to his advantage is because he's the only one out of five us that actually grew up in North End.

PHILLIP:

Columbo, what are you doing? Chris fucked up big time.

–Yeah, he's in trouble with the Marines.

–He fuckin' calls up, he calls his boss, he says, "Hey, I ain't comin' into work today." His boss goes, "Why not?" He says, "I'm goin' and gettin' beaned with the broad." His boss says, "Yeah?" They put him in the brig. Then he took a piss test and ah...

BOBBY:

Every time I hear my younger brother talk, I cringe because it's fine for the area, it's fine for your family, you know, but when you travel outside the area and you travel outside the family you're gonna have to pronounce your R's and you're gonna have to think of what you're saying and you're gonna have to learn to articulate. And all he could do is talk in one manner.

PHILIP:

I would never change growin' up in the city. It's the best thing that ever happened to me, it really was. It's such an advantage over people. If you go to a club, you start talkin' to a babe and she

says, “You Italian?” I say, “What makes you think dat?” She says, “You talk like an Italian.” And then you start giving her the accent and yeah, youse guys and where youse from and I’m wit tree of my friends, I tru the football all day and this, that, and the otha, and stuff like that and the women, they eat it up. They love that, they really do, they thrive on that and then you get a guy, right, and you tell ‘em – Don’t fuck with me I’ll break your motha fuckin’ head. And right away the guy he says, wow, this kid’s from the city, he’s gonna pull a shank on me and cut me and you can intimidate people with your verbal actions.

PHILIP:

Now you know where I’m sittin’? The first three rows.

GIRL:

Are you?

PHILIP:

Watch, we walk right in like we own the joint. Seriously. I’d be lost without growing up in the city and having these assets. I use them as an asset instead of a liability, you know, and when they went to college it was a liability for my brothers, you know, but then again, they ain’t as smart as me.

---BLACK ENGLISH---

(PHILADELPHIA)

MAN #1:

Incense. Body oil. Incense today, bro?

MAN #2:

I ain’t got too much money.

MAN #1:

Don’t worry about it brother. We can work it out, just smell that? Three fifty. Smell that.

MAN #2:

Now you hustlin’ me.

MAN #1:

No, I'm workin' with you...

MAN #2:

You work...

MAN #1:

I'm workin' with you. I'm tryin' to meet you.

MAN #2:

Man, you sure this real, man?

MAN #1:

All day long, real? I'm scared of it, it's so real. Lemme buy me a bag.

NARRATOR:

The dialect of many Black Americans is what is often called "Black English." Although the roots of Black English go back hundreds of years, its use is still controversial today.

NEW ORLEANS TEENAGER #1:

Yeah, girl, I met a dude, too. His name is Kevin. He was with his girlfriend and I didn't play nothin' like that. So, I let him alone.

NEW ORLEANS TEENAGER #2:

I saw this guy named Mike...

NONA STOKES, EDUCATOR:

I think the majority of white America, you know, does not accept "Black English", but not because of the language itself, because of the people who speak it. Which is racism. Most of the white varieties are accepted. They might not be similar, you know, and they might not be so, you know, "correct", but they are accepted.

NARRATOR:

Even though Black English is mocked and looked down upon by many white people, a lot of Black Americans use it to relate to one another everyday. And those who don't use it in their home communities, run the risk of becoming outsiders.

CLEVELAND MAN:

I know that my two children are in suburban systems. When I hear them talk, sometimes it grates on me to be honest. My two sons, one's twelve and one's fifteen. When I hear them talk sometimes, I say, my God, I mean, am I raising two white boys here? And I don't mean that to be negative with respect to white males, but I don't want my boys sounding like white males. And when I first, I started listening because a couple of my cousins came over and they said, my age, and they said, "What's happening with your sons, man, why do they sound like that?" I said, "Sound like what?"

INTERVIEWER:

Do the three of you talk in the same way?

GIRLS:

Yeah.

No.

Yeah.

GIRL #1:

I think, think me and Sharon do, it's just not Amelia.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the difference?

GIRL #2:

I don't use slang as much.

GIRL #3:

I know what the difference is. Amelia has a proper voice than us. She talks proper.

GIRL #2:

I don't use slang as much.

INTERVIEWER:

Why not?

GIRL #2:

I don't know.

GIRL #3:

I know why. Cause she a schoolgirl and a mama's girl. I'm a mama girl, too, but you know I still be using them slangs - What's happening, girl? Where you been, been at, everybody's talkin' nothin' much, huh.

GIRL #1:

That's my girl. So it ain't about nothin'...

INTERVIEWER:

So, is it a bad thing to speak proper?

GIRL #3:

Yeah, we call Amelia "bunny rags"...

GIRL #2:

Some people, some people look at you different because you don't use as much slang as something, she's trying to be cute or something like that.

POPCORN HARRIS:

You have been made to believe that you own language that you've been communicating with is a bad language.

JERRY:

But that's not your own language.

POPCORN HARRIS:

It is your own language. White's don't talk that way.

JERRY:

Is it their language. Is it their language? Who's language is it. Who's language is it? Listen to me. The only time you're gonna use Black vernacular is standin' on the corner with your arms around your buddy talkin' and rappin', at a party where everybody's high. When you're trying to take care of business and you're trying to make yourself, your trying to increase your level,

standards of living, believe me, Black vernacular, ain't gonna mean no more than that cigarette butt laying on the ground.

NONA STOKES:

The hardest thing though is for me to try to show the legitimacy of Black English. That what your parents speak what your sisters and brothers speak is not bad English, it's not slang, it's not something that you have to look down upon it's just another variety and at the same time, say, well, but still you gotta learn Standard English.

POPCORN HARRIS:

But whether it's slang, or whether it is Standard English. It's still a language. Don't tell me it ain't a language. It's a language that you have snobbed and got indoctrinated...

NONA STOKES:

It's more than just accepting a dialect, it you have to really understand that it's politics, too. It's not accepting the people that speak that variety. So, you can't just say that, okay, you guys, if you speak Standard English, you're gonna get that job, you know, 'cause that's not true. You know, but you might not get the job because still that you're Black, but at least if you speak a standard variety they can't say you didn't get the job because you couldn't speak Standard English, you know. At least you'd know that they can't lay that on me.

NARRATOR:

Black or white, Texan or New Yorker, few people talk the same way all the time. There's one way of talking to friends and family and another way for business or school. We switch back and forth because we know there is no one way that works in every situation. Language can bring us together or set us apart. Our social and racial attitudes are mixed in with what we feel about peoples accents. And because the way we talk is so much a part of who we are. We feel a special bond with people who talk the same way we do.

SONG:

Put some South in your mouth—  
Put some Dixie in your talk  
Let me hear that Southern drawl  
When you say ya'll.

NARRATOR:



Across the country it sounds as though we're having a renewal of pride in our roots and in our speech as well; people are getting rid of the notion that everybody should sound alike. We're recognizing that our accents are part and parcel of our diverse identities and we're certainly not afraid to advertise it.

TEXAN:

Some people think I have Lone Star fever, that I take Texas pride too far. They say that's the only reason I eat Ron's Crispy Fried Chicken – Come on!

NEW YORKER:

Do you own a foreign car? Well, if you do I have a tune-up special for you! Right now for only \$19.95 plus parts...

MISSISSIPPIAN:

J.L. Jones Discount Furniture out on Whitfield Road is the place that we invite you to come and save money the year round.

ERNEST P.

Hey, Vern – Umm, Umm, smells great. Cookin' on a gas grill. Hot, fast, and cheap. You know, Vern...

NARRATOR:

Some people think television is making us all speak the same way, but that's not really the case. It's true, you may not speak exactly the way your parents do. Americans are more mobile and better educated today than ever before, but we'll never all speak the same.

ERNEST P.

Listen, um, play it smart Vernon and call your gas company. You shoulda talked to your ol' buddy Ernest first. You know what I mean? I believe them ribs are about ready, Vern!

FRED CASSIDY, EDITOR OF DARE:

The little differences that are with us everywhere we go are not likely to be changed. As long as they don't prevent comprehension. As long as they don't keep you from knowing what somebody else is saying or what you are saying to somebody else. As long as they don't spoil communication. Then we 're not going to change them. Why should we? I don't want to sound

like somebody from some other part of the country. I don't know what's wrong with my own speech. We don't have to all talk alike. So, I think that's a general feeling.

NEW ORLEANS MAN:

So, you're not embarrassed by the way you talk or...

QUESTION:

Absolutely not.

NEW ORLEANS MAN:

You know, I mean, it's not a matter of pride or anything, but I mean I don't want to go through the process of making my tongue do this stuff you have to do to talk right, I mean, you know why put forth the effort? Everybody knows me.

SONG:

Let's call the whole thing off.

TITLE RECITERS:

American Tongues was produced and directed by  
Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker.  
The coordinating producer was Susan Milano.  
The line producer was Lora Myers.  
Music by Mac Rebennack, Lou Marini, and George Davis.  
Narrated by Trey Wilson  
Editing consultant – John Purcell  
The advisors were Walt Wolfram of the University of the District of Columbia  
Frederic Cassidy of the Dictionary of American Regional English  
Raven McDavid of the University of Chicago  
The local coordinators were Shirley Perlman and Sis May.  
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The Southwestern Alternate Media Project  
This has been a production of the Center for New American Media

SONG:

Let's call the whole thing off...

{Final Credits}

GEORGIA WOMAN:

A friend of theirs left Louisiana, the state that he was born and went to New York. And when he came back he had this accent, you know, this southern picked up northern accent – and he walked in the restaurant (its on that tomato kick too) and he said um, I want a menu please. And they passed him the menu and he looked at it. He says, I think I want an order of potatoes and tomatoes and some lettuce. And they gave him and when they brought the bill they turned the bill down and he ate and when he had finished eating and he turned the bill up he said, “My God, Almighty, I never ‘nown taters and matters to cost so much.”

[END]