Tease:

NARRATOR:

How we talk to one another defines who we are.

JOHN COFFIN:

Ayuh!

NARRATOR:

And American English is as rich, diverse and lively as Americans themselves.

CAJUN MAN:

(Cajun) (Laughter)

NARRATOR:

From North to South.

SPANKY:

Up there on 65 is where I started, ok?

NARRATOR:

East to West.

GIRL:

I say like “like” and “dude” every other word.

ATHLETIC MIC LEAGUE:

Say Eh, Eh!

NARRATOR:

We love to talk.

ROBERT:

Is there somebody else that I could talk to?

NARRATOR:

Yap.

WOMAN:

I said a car!

NARRATOR:

Dish.

PATRICIA LOPEZ:

(Spanglish)…La Chica Sexy.

NARRATOR:

And chew the fat.

TOMMY:

It's not a fur piece to Rabbit Hash.

NARRATOR:

It's clear that you are what you speak.

STEVE HARVEY:

Isn't is not in my vocabulary. The word is ain't.

NARRATOR:

So butter my butt and call me a biscuit. And sit tight, as we answer the burning question…

ROBERT:

Do You Speak American?

Title Sequence:

MAN:

Do you speak American?

WOMAN:

Do you like speak American?

LOBSTERMAN:

Do you speak American?

MAN:

Do you speak American?

YOUTH:

Do you speak American dog?

COWGIRL:

Do you speak American?

JEFF FOXWORTHY:

Do y'all speak American?

WOMAN:

Tu parles Americain?

SOLDIERS:

Do you speak American?

STUDENTS:

Do you speak American?

PATRICIA LOPEZ:

Estás hablando American?

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Hour One:

ROBERT:

LIKE MANY AMERICANS I COME FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE. I GREW UP ALONG THIS RUGGED ATLANTIC SHORE IN THE CANADIAN PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA. AND MY SPEECH WAS COLORED BY THE DIALECT OF MARITIME CANADA. IT'S ONE OF THE GREAT FAMILY OF NORTH AMERICAN ENGLISHES. BUT WHEN I MOVED TO THE U.S. I BEGAN TO SPEAK MORE LIKE AMERICANS. WORDS, ACCENTS, LANGUAGE HAVE ALWAYS FASCINATED ME, SO IT WAS THRILLING TWENTY YEARS AGO TO WORK ON A TV SERIES ABOUT THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

ROBERT:

In our television series the Story of English we traced the origins of our language and how it spread around the world. That was in the 1980's, and I'm curious to see how the language has

moved on since then. Once thing is clearer - American English has become the dominant form of the language. So I'm setting out on a journey now to see what's happening to English in the United States. What answers do you get today when you ask: Do You Speak American?

ROBERT:

OUR JOURNEY STARTS IN THE FAR NORTH EAST ON A MISTY ROAD IN COASTAL MAINE.

LINGUISTS WHO STUDY THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE SAY THE PRINCIPAL REGIONAL DIALECTS REMAIN STRONG, BUT SOME DISTINCTIVE LOCAL DIALECTS ARE DYING OUT.

HERE AMONG THE LOBSTERMEN IN SOUTH FREEPORT, MAINE, YOU CAN STILL HEAR THE LACONIC, TERSE STYLE THAT SOUNDS SO NEW ENGLAND.

BUT WITH MASS COMMUNICATIONS AND CHANGES IN POPULATION, MANY WORRY THAT THE MAINE WAY OF SPEAKING MAY BECOME AS SCARCE AS LOBSTERS.

JOHN COFFIN:

We're down about fifty or sixty percent from what we used to do six or eight years ago.

ROBERT:

Really? Because the lobster's just aren't there, you mean?

JOHN COFFIN:

They're not here ----Something's happening we don't know what.

ROBERT:

The lobsters have decided to move on.

JOHN COFFIN:

They have moved. That's obvious, but …

ROBERT:

Would you be sad if the Maine way of talking kind of died out?

JOHN COFFIN:

Yes I think so, probably. I'd like to think my kids and grandchildren talk that way whether people laugh at you wherever we go, whatever.

ROBERT:

Do people laugh at it?

JOHN COFFIN:

They have. Oh, lots of times. They used to when I was in the military make fun of me wicked.

ROBERT:

--- so how do people from round here say yes?

JOHN COFFIN:

Ayuh.

ROBERT:

Ayuh.

JOHN COFFIN:

Ayuh. Yep.

ROBERT:

-- how do you spell it?

JOHN COFFIN:

A – y – u - h.

ROBERT:

Ayuh.

JOHN COFFIN:

Ayuh yeh that's it.

ROBERT:

LINGUISTICALLY, THE WAY MAINERS SPEAK IS PART OF A REGIONAL SPEECH PATTERN CENTERED ON BOSTON.

IT DERIVES FROM EARLY BRITISH COLONISTS WHO DIDN'T PRONOUNCE THE 'R' AT THE END OF WORDS LIKE'FATHER.'

LOCAL DIALECTS THRIVE WHEN COMMUNITIES ARE ISOLATED. WHEN MANY OUTSIDERS MOVE IN, LOCAL SPEECH CHANGES.

THAT'S WHY MAINERS FEAR THAT THEIR DIALECT WITH ITS FAMOUS "AYUH" IS COMING TO THE END OF THE ROAD.

ROBERT:

Hello.

LINTON MILLET:

Good morning. And how are you today?

ROBERT:

I'm fine. How are you?

LINTON MILLET:

A good educated monkey could do a job like this. Yessir.

ROBERT:

Thank you

ROBERT:

LINGUISTS DRAW THEIR OWN MAPS OF NORTH AMERICA TO MARK DIFFERENT DIALECT AREAS. TO USE THEIR TERMS, WE'VE STARTED IN EASTERN NEW ENGLAND, WE'RE GOING ON TO NEW YORK AND PHILADELPHIA, THEN WEST INTO THE MIDLAND DIALECT, THEN THE NORTHERN, THE SOUTHERN AND ON TO THE WEST.

RIGHT NOW I'M IN MASSACHUSSETTS AND I'M SHORT OF GAS.

PAM HEAD:

Evening, what can I get for ya?

ROBERT:

Can you fill her up with unleaded, please?

ROBERT:

When customers come from out of state like me what do they think about your accent?

PAM HEAD:

I lived in Oklahoma for a short time and I had a conversation with a girl from Texas one day and I was in the process of buying a cah and she says what are you talking about? I said a cah! She says what is a cah? I says what's a cah ----I said you know automobile, vehicle, thing you get in and drive, she goes oh you mean a car. I said no a cah. It was funny. I did I had to go through all the different words before she understood what I was talking about.

ROBERT:

That's funny

PAM HEAD:

Yup. It was a riot.

ROBERT:

WITH THAT ACCENT, WE MIGHT AS WELL BE IN THE HEART OF BOSTON, WHOSE WAY OF SPEAKING SHOWS NO WEAKENING.

AMERICANS CONSIDER THEMSELVES EGALITARIAN AND UNSNOBBISH ABOUT ACCENTS, BUT THEY ARE FULL OF NOTIONS ABOUT HOW NOT TO SPEAK.

I'M INDULGING A SENTIMENTAL WHIM TO RETRACE A ROAD I TOOK MANY SUMMERS AGO.

THIS IS THE PRISCILLA BEACH THEATER, ONE OF THE OLDEST BARN THEATRES IN NEW ENGLAND - HERE I FIND ACTOR-MANAGER GERONIMO SANDS REHEARSING HIS ONE MAN SHOW.

GERONIMO SANDS:

Beware of respectable people. Of people perfectly grammatical and proud of it.

ROBERT:

I SPENT ONE SUMMER HERE AS AN ACTOR. WE WERE ALL YOUNG, EAGER AND AMBITIOUS. WE DID EVERYTHING FROM SWEEPING THE STAGE TO PLAYING ROMANTIC COMEDIES.

IT WAS ON THIS STAGE THAT I FIRST LEARNED THAT MY SPEECH WAS NOT CONSIDERED CORRECT.

ROBERT:

And the first time I stood on this stage and opened my mouth, the director, he said: "What did you say?" And they said "you can't talk like that." Because in Nova Scotia you pronounce, at least I pronounced, out like oat and about like a-boat. And so I consciously changed it and this is a wonderful sentimental stop for me because it was, I was I was 21 and that's 52 years ago that I was here and it was a great summer.

ROBERT:

AFTER THAT SUMMER, I DROVE TO NEW YORK. MY ACTING AMBITIONS FORTUNATELY DIED BUT THE CITY HAS BECOME MY HOME.

THE CRACKLING ENERGY OF THE CREATIVE FORCES CONCENTRATED HERE, THE SHEER AMERICAN POWER REPRESENTED, MAKE NEW YORK AN ENORMOUS GENERATOR OF LANGUAGE.

THE LATEST MONEY JARGON OF WALL STREET TRADERS…

THE FRESHER THAN FRESH SLOGANS OF OUR RELENTLESS ADVERTISING…

THE LANGUAGE THAT FUELS THE GREAT PUBLISHING EMPIRES…

FROM THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS, 24/7, ON TV, CABLE, RADIO, ELECTRONIC MEDIA, COME THE WORDS AND IDEAS THAT DEFINE AMERICAN CULTURE AND MARKET IT TO THE WORLD.

YOU CAN MAKE A CASE THAT NEW YORK CITY IS NOW THE GLOBAL CAPITAL OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

BUT WHAT A LANGUAGE! RESTLESS, SLANGY, CONSTANTLY CHANGING, AND EVER MORE INFORMAL.

ROBERT:

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT CHANGE IS NOT ONLY INEVITABLE BUT UNSTOPPABLE.

BUT NOT JOHN SIMON, THE ACERBIC THEATRE CRITIC OF *NEW YORK MAGAZINE*.

A YUGOSLAV IMMIGRANT HIMSELF, HE SPEAKS FOR MANY MAINSTREAM AMERICANS WHO FEAR THAT IF AMERICAN ENGLISH CONTINUES TO FLOUT THE RULES OF SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR, IT'LL SOW THE SEEDS OF ITS OWN DESTRUCTION.

JOHN SIMON:

Well it has gotten worse.

JOHN SIMON:

--- it's been my experience that there is no bottom, one can always sink lower, and that the language can always disintegrate further.

ROBERT:

How would you describe the state of our language today?

JOHN SIMON:

Unhealthy, poor, sad, depressing, um, and probably fairly hopeless.

ROBERT:

JESSE SHEIDLOWER STANDS FOR EVERYTHING JOHN SIMON HATES.

HE IS THE AMERICAN EDITOR OF THE AUGUST OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. WITH HIS DARK SUIT, TIE AND ROLLED UP UMBRELLA, HE CERTAINLY LOOKS THE PART. BUT YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER, FOR HE'S ALSO THE AUTHOR OF A SCHOLARLY HISTORY OF THE F-WORD.

JESSE'S OFTEN IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY LOOKING FOR NEW USAGES.

AMERICAN ENGLISH HAS ALWAYS BEEN INVENTIVE BUT IT IS NOW GLOBALLY SO INFLUENTIAL THAT THE OXFORD DICTIONARY NEEDS A FULL-TIME OFFICE IN NEW YORK CITY.

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

Well American English has always been, at least for the last hundred years, it's always taken great pleasure in its slang. You can find even Walt Whitman writing in praise of slang in the nineteenth century, about how wonderful it is and how poetic it is, and how, you know, this is the American spirit distilled into language.

ROBERT:

So when you come here what are you, what are you looking for?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

We'll try to find magazines that have words in them that we think are gonna be of interest, and these can be in really any field out there.

ROBERT:

What are you looking at at the moment here?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

Well right now we're looking at some magazines devoted to tattooing and body piercing. There are terms for these different kinds of piercing and there are terms for different kinds of tattoos. ---- Blue, a music magazine, has a lot of stuff about hip hop, which is a big influence on the language. Guide to Zines, Fanzines, um…

ROBERT:

Fanzines, fan magazines?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

Yes, well, they're just called Zines nowadays.

ROBERT:

So if you find a new, a new word in one of these, one of these really lurid magazines, um, and you decide to put it in, does that mean that the dictionary has adopted the word and as it were recognised it?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

No, not all. For now it just means that we have an example in the data base, but then we have an example in Time Magazine and then we have an example in New York Magazine, and now we have an example in so and so. And we start to think, well okay, this is term that started off as a very restricted sub cultural thing, but now it's very wide spread. And the fact that we did read

something like this originally will tell us something that we wouldn't know if all we read was Newsweek.

ROBERT:

I see.

ROBERT:

LANGUAGE ENTHUSIASTS TEND TO BE EITHER PRESCRIPTIVISTS OR DESCRIPTIVISTS. DESCRIPTIVISTS LIKE SHEIDLOWER AND OTHER DICTIONARY MAKERS ARE CONTENT TO DESCRIBE LANGUAGE AS IT CHANGES. PRESCRIPTIVISTS LIKE SIMON BELIEVE YOU NEED PRESCRIBED RULES TO PRESERVE LANGUAGE.

JOHN SIMON:

---- the descriptive linguists are a curse upon their race, uh who uh of course think that what the people say is the law. And by that they mean the majority, they mean the uneducated. I think a society which the uneducated lead the educated by the nose is not a good society.

ROBERT:

DESCRIPTIVISTS DENY TREATING UNEDUCATED USAGE AS "THE LAW," SINCE THEY LABEL IT NON-STANDARD.

BUT THEY MAY RECORD THINGS LIKE THE OFTEN VIOLENT, HOMOPHOBIC, MISOGYNISTIC LYRICS OF GANGSTA RAP.

THE RESULT GIVES NEW CURRENCY TO WORDS LIKE "HO" AND "BITCH."

CECE CUTLER IS AN ACADEMIC WHO HAS STUDIED THE APPEAL THAT HIP HOP HAS FOR WHITE SUBURBAN TEENAGE BOYS.

CECE CUTLER:

For white male teenagers who are in the process of forming their identities as as young men, the urban black male represents someone who who knows how to pick up women, who knows how to handle himself on the street, who perhaps knows how to handle a weapon and can take care of himself. This kind of way of walking or talking or dressing can give one the trappings of a masculinity that doesn't perhaps exist in the safe white suburbs.

CECE CUTLER:

--- The sort-of more hard core rappers that might appeal to young men who are sort of afraid of young women and are in the process of trying to figure out how it is that one deals with them.

ROBERT:

So to call the bitches and ho's is a kind of way of getting rid of that problem?

CECE CUTLER:

Or putting away one's fear of of those individuals.

DAVE:

Were there uh, bitches at the party?

JASON:

Yeah there were a couple…

DAVE:

For real?

DAVE:

For sure man.

DAVE:

There there's more, there's been more, there's more ho's recently, I've noticed at underground events. There used to be not so many.

DAVE:

Thank goodness for us man.

ROBERT:

Can you think of some examples of words that have crossed over from hip hop into the mainstream?

CECE CUTLER:

Uh we have terms like mad as a quantifier so you can says it's mad real or it's mad raining. There are terms like my bad to mean oh I just made a mistake or the more colourful bling bling to refer to expensive gaudy jewellery.

ROBERT:

Any others?

CECE CUTLER:

Well you could say whassup b? to ask how somebody is.

KATE:

Chopsticks. Hey what's up? Snuttle. Just chillin, you? Snuttle my bubble. Do you guys still have exams?

Tom:

Aaliyah, that's cool.

ROBERT:

BLACK ENGLISH IS AN OBVIOUS INFLUENCE ON THE LANGUAGE OF "IM-ING" – INSTANT MESSAGING.

TOM:

Birdman. So anything new? Birdman. You gonna do anything else this weekend?

ROBERT:

WRITTEN ENGLISH HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PRESERVER OF STANDARD ENGLISH BUT WRITTEN STANDARDS ARE ALWAYS UNDER ASSAULT. THE LATEST THREAT COMES FROM INSTANT MESSAGING.

ROBERT:

How much time do you guys spend doing this?

KATE:

An hour and a half.

ROBERT:

An hour and a half a day? Tom how much time do you spend doing this?

TOM:

A lot. I multitask, so I'll be IM-ing, I'll be listening to music, I'll be doing my homework.

KATE:

I mean no one does caps or periods or punctuation, it's just... OMG is oh my god. And this is just short for know. Like sometimes people say g2g which means got to go.

TOM:

JC, that means just chilling. Here's lol, laugh out loud. This means I'm going, I will, Ima. Then she says here you better call me on my cell. Sup with you, what's up. It's like, you know, how you talk, so...how are you doing, honey?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

Written English in America has been evolving greatly over the last certainly hundred years, and especially the last thirty or forty years. Nowadays if you look at even the most formal publications, things like The New Yorker or The New York Times, you will see a wide variety of, of colloquial or slangy language used even in news articles. Um, people are interested in this, people speak this way and wanna reflect this way in their writing. Written English has become much more informal than it ever used to be.

ROBERT:

What do you say to the people like JOHN SIMON who are really angry about what they see as a serious decline in linguistic standards in this country?

JESSE SHEIDLOWER:

Well I think they're wrong and I think they're misguided. Language change happens and there's nothing you can do about it.

JOHN SIMON:

I mean maybe change is inevitable, maybe, maybe dying from cancer is also inevitable but I don't think we should help it along.

ROBERT:

BUT CASUAL GRAMMAR AND DISTURBING NEW WORDS AREN'T THE ONLY PERCEIVED THREAT TO AMERICAN ENGLISH.

NEW YORK HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE GREAT DOORWAY FOR IMMIGRATION.

TODAY YOU CAN HEAR SPANISH SPOKEN ALL AROUND YOU.

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION IS WHETHER HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS WILL ADOPT ENGLISH AS OTHER IMMIGRANTS DID.

IN NEW YORK, AS IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, YOU'LL FIND PLENTY OF LATINOS WHO DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH AT ALL.

Robert:

Hello. Do you speak English? No? Espanol?

ROBERT:

ROSA HAS LIVED HERE FOR 19 YEARS BUT SPEAKS NO ENGLISH.

ROSA:

--- diez y nueve anos?

MAN:

19 years.

ROBERT:

SHE SAYS SHE'S BEEN TOO BUSY WORKING.

ROSA:

Porque siempre …trabajar no …tiempo

ROBERT:

You were always working, yes, uh huh.

ROBERT:

AMERICAN ENGLISH HAS ALWAYS BORROWED FROM IMMIGRANT LANGUAGES AND BEEN ENRICHED BY THEM.

BUT IS SPANISH SOMETHING DIFFERENT? IS IT REPLACING ENGLISH?

ROBERT:

And it's a dollar?

ROSA:

One dollar.

ROBERT:

One dollar. Thank you very much. Muchas gracias.

ROSA:

Gracias

ROBERT:

Thank you. Buenos dias.

ROBERT:

WE'LL RETURN TO THE SPANISH QUESTION LATER IN OUR JOURNEY. BUT FOR NOW I'M IN SEARCH OF STANDARD AMERICAN.

ROBERT:

Continuing down the Eastern seaboard we're headed for Philadelphia, of course the cradle of American democracy but also in a way the cradle of what we now think of as the American speech.

ROBERT:

AT THIS STAGE, WHAT INTERESTS ME MOST IS THE WHOLE IDEA OF WHAT PASSES FOR "CORRECT" OR "INCORRECT" IN AMERICAN ENGLISH.

ROBERT:

EVEN BEFORE AMERICA DECLARED ITS INDEPENDENC E FROM BRITAIN HERE IN PHILADELPHIA, THE TWO ENGLISHES HAD BEEN GOING THEIR OWN WAYS. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW ONCE JOKED THAT THE TWO NATIONS WERE SEPARATED BY THE SAME LANGUAGE.

BILL LABOV IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE ATLAS OF NORTH AMERICAN ENGLISH.

ROBERT:

What do you consider standard American?

BILL LABOV:

Well most linguists recognise that there is a broadcast standard pronunciation, which is not fixed, but which converges towards a pattern that is not local. And that's changed over time.

ROBERT:

It drew originally from where?

BILL LABOV:

From England, there was something called international English that was really modelled upon British received pronunciation, that took its form in London, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Americans were not all influenced by it, only the big Tory cities, Boston, New York, Savannah Charleston, Richmond. They adopted that R-less pronunciation whereby you say 'cah' not 'car' and 'store' was shifts to 'staw', and that's still the pattern in England today ----

BILL LABOV:

For me the model of that international English standard was always FDR. He was a New Yorker who had the prestige pattern of the upper class in New York and it was really R-less ---- it sounded like this…

FDR ON PC:

To those who would not admit the possibility of the approaching storm, the past two weeks have meant the shattering of many illusions. With this rude awakening has come fear, fear bordering on panic. I do not share these fears.

BILL LABOV:

So you notice that every time the letter R comes up unless a vowel follows its gonna sound like this

FDR ON PC:

The approaching storm

ROBERT:

'stom'

BILL LABOV:

Not 'storm' but 'stom' and…

FDR ON PC:

I do not share these fears

BILL LABOV:

But he - it's more than just the R eh you notice the way he say shattering, and utter good faith. So the pronunciation of T as T in those situations still found in Boston eh was again modelled on the British pattern and eh it held right up to the end of World War Two. And then, to our great astonishment it flipped. So right after world war two people growing up eh in New York City and in many other cities behaved in just the opposite way. When they were careful they pronounced their Rs. And when they were not careful, just speaking casually, they stayed with their R-less dialect.

ROBERT:

So people wanted to sound more English before World War II and less so after World War II.

BILL LABOV:

We hear British people use that pattern and we love it, but it's not right for an American.

ROBERT:

LABOV BELIEVES PHILADELPHIA SHAPED AMERICAN SPEECH MORE THAN ANY OTHER CITY, BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY EAST COAST CITY ORGINALLY TO PRONOUNCE ITS Rs. AND THAT R-SOUND, THAT SO TYPIFIES AMERICAN ENGLISH, MIGRATED WEST.

WE'RE HEADING WEST OURSELVES ON THE TRAIN TO OHIO.

OHIO IS THE OPENING TO WHAT LINGUISTS CALL THE MIDLAND DIALECT.

MIDLAND SPEECH LIES BETWEEN THE VARIETIES OF THE NORTH AND THOSE OF THE SOUTH.

FOR THIS LEG OF THE JOURNEY WE'RE JOINED BY LINGUIST DENNIS PRESTON.

DENNIS STUDIES THE STRONG OPINIONS WE SEEM TO HOLD ABOUT WHAT WE BELIEVE IS RIGHT OR WRONG IN THE SPEECH OF OUR FELLOW AMERICANS.

DENNIS PRESTON:

--- there's a kind of American linguistic insecurity which is very, very old. After all we didn't invent English. There, there were the English who had a hold of it before us. And so there is a kind of lingering American insecurity that well maybe with English we, we don't do the very best thing. On the other hand there's American populism and a desire not to be stuffy, not to be too correct.

DENNIS PRESTON:

I've been walking around this train --- asking people to draw on blank maps of the United States the areas where they think people speak differently…

DENNIS PRESTON:

You wanna write anything on it you can…

DENNIS PRESTON:

They don't, they don't just do dialect areas. They identify those areas where they think the least correct or the most correct English is spoken and draw circles around that. Nine times out of ten when you ask people to do this they go for either the US south, which is almost universally believed to be a place where bad English is spoken, or New York City.

DENNIS PRESTON:

But New Yorkers you're sure of they don't sound like Pennsylvanians.

WOMAN:

Yeah, no, they saw 'wawder.'

DENNIS PRESTON:

They say what?

WOMAN:

'Wawder.'

DENNIS PRESTON:

'Wooder.'

WOMAN:

Wawder.

DENNIS PRESTON:

Instead of - what do you say?

WOMAN:

Water.

DENNIS PRESTON:

Water well that's what I say.

ROBERT:

AMERICANS ARE AMBIVALENT ABOUT LANGUAGE. THEY MAY THINK THAT NEW YORK AND SOUTHERN ACCENTS ARE BAD ENGLISH. BUT THEY CAN ALSO FIND THEM CHARMING.

MAN 2:

Eh I like hearing people from eh the south…

DENNIS PRESTON:

Really?

MAN 2:

Yeah.

DENNIS PRESTON:

How come?

MAN 2:

I just, I just like the way they talk like to hear the way they talk.

MAN 3:

Let's take race out of the equation

DENNIS PRESTON:

All right okay.

MAN 3:

Well we take race out of the equation, if I go to a place in the South where at least they are not overtly eh racist or whatever, I would tend to feel comfortable around Southerners.

DENNIS PRESTON:

Makes you feel…

MAN 3:

Come on in here honey, that kind of thing and yeah it makes me feel a little more eh, eh. But I mean there's some places in the south that me, as a black, I wouldn't be caught dead in.

DENNIS PRESTON:

Oh no, no that's another story yeah, yeah.

MAN 3:

Yes.

DENNIS PRESTON:

It would make no difference how they sound.

MAN 3:

Absolutely.

ROBERT:

I WANT TO MAKE A SHORT STOP-OVER IN PITTSBURGH, BECAUSE IT SHOWS HOW COMMUNITIES CAN CLING TO AN ACCENT AS A BADGE OF IDENTITY AND LOCAL PRIDE.

I'M HERE TO MEET WITH A LINGUIST WHO HAS BEEN STUDYING HER FELLOW PITTSBURGHERS' IDIOSYNCRATIC WAY WITH WORDS.

SHE'S BARBARA JOHNSTONE.

ROBERT:

How would you describe the language of Pittsburgh?

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

Well people talk about something they call Pittsburghese. They have a strong idea that there's way of talking that happens here and only here or in this, in this part of Pennsylvania in this area.

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

Here's the store that's got some interesting stuff, shirts here with Pittsburghese on them. Old scotch-irish words which you can still hear in Belfast.

ROBERT:

That's a very unusual word for me first of all what does it mean?

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

This is a way of spelling Yins, which is the plural of you.

ROBERT:

Yeah?

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

It's also often spelt with a Z at the end, which reflects more how it sounds I suppose with a U 'yunz' uh…

ROBERT:

Do you have any sense of where it came from?

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

It’s actually a form of plural you that's found pretty wide spread in Appalachia but often it's spelt more like 'you'uns.'

ROBERT:

IN “THE BURGH” THE WORDS “IN AND OUT” SOUND MORE LIKE “IN AN AHHT”. DOWN AND TOWN LIKE “DAHN” AND “TAHN”.

ROBERT:

How would you say them, starting at the top?

SALESMAN:

Aht.

ROBERT:

'Aht.'

SALESMAN:

Opposite of in.

SALESMAN:

'Babushka', head scarf used for a bad hair day. Blittsburgh, drinking town or football team. Chipped ham – thinly sliced ham sold only in the ‘burgh. 'Downtown' that's where you're at now.

ROBERT:

We’re at now, ok.

SALESMAN:

Now here’s the greatest - we don't want the lady to read this one it’s 'jag off' anyone who pisses off a Pittsburgher.

ROBERT:

What do you have to do to piss off a Pittsburgher?

SALESMAN:

Eh just tell them the Steelers suck. Ah you're down hill – you'll ride on a good break there.

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

I think I've always been interested in how people relate to places. The, you often hear the claim these days that in the context of globalization and people moving around that places don't matter the way they used to. And since I'm a linguist I've looked at this through language. I've looked at kind of shared ways of talking and shared ideas about ways of talking to connect themselves with places and to connect themselves with other people and communities.

ROBERT:

So Pittsburghers fierce pride in their own speech is a measure of the importance of place?

BARBARA JOHNSTONE:

I think so. This local accent, which is different from how people talk elsewhere is available as a way of talking about place. And all the while they're talking about who they are and where they live and what it means to live here.

ROBERT:

IN A COUNTRY FULL OF LINGUISTIC VARIETY, THERE IS ONE VARIETY THAT EVERYONE SEES AS THE 'NORM.'

DENNIS PRESTON:

There's a great deal of agreement in the sort of Ohio Michigan, Northern Indiana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania zone of eh normal English. Even Southerners for example will reach right up and draw that mid-western area and say it's normal.

DENNIS PRESTON:

So, so this is where you say the kind of correct American English is spoken?

MAN 4:

That's what I would say that's all, without an accent or a twang.

MAN 5:

But what's out here, what States are?

DENNIS PRESTON:

Um…

MAN 4:

Kansas, Missouri…

MAN 5:

Oh.

DENNIS PRESTON:

Kansas Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska…

MAN 3:

If you took a speech class I think that they would want you to speak more like these people here.

DENNIS PRESTON:

This Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota…

MAN 3:

Wisconsin, Michigan, I should add Ohio in there

DENNIS PRESTON:

Yeah it's in there there's Ohio

MAN 3:

Okay Ohio is in there.

DENNIS PRESTON:

So there, so if you were, were studying to be an announcer or something you think this is the…

MAN 3:

This is what they would this…

DENNIS PRESTON:

That's the target.

MAN 3:

That's the target.

ROBERT:

TECHNICALLY THE DIALECT AREA THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT IS CALLED MIDLAND.

MIDLAND IS SPOKEN IN MUCH OF THE MIDWEST.

FOR MOST AMERICANS THIS IS THE YARDSTICK - THE MOST NORMAL AND CORRECT OF ALL DIALECTS.

AND AMERICANS ARE TERRIBLY CONCERNED WITH CORRECTNESS.

ROBERT:

A lot of people are worried about the state of the language, particularly the written language. So much so that they've set up hotlines all over the country, where you can call if you have questions about correct grammar. Even in the last 10 years or so, they've produced a directory of grammar hotlines in the U.S. and Canada. I think I'm gonna pull over and call one.

ROBERT:

ULLE LEWES MANAGES THE ORIGNAL HOTLINE.

Ulle:

We get calls from Canada, we get calls from the United Nations we've gotten calls from many lawyers and lawfirms. We've even gotten a call from the White House, they would not say which branch.

ROBERT:

I see. Uh may I ask you a question myself?

Ulle:

Oh certainly, go ahead.

ROBERT:

Um, is it, is it getting harder to maintain the written standards, or the standards in the written language do you find?

Ulle:

Yeah, we do have troubles with the grapholect.

Robert:

What does that mean grapholect?

Ulle:

Well dialect means the way we speak. There are about sixty dialects of English on our planet. Pakistan, Nigeria, you name it. If you think about it er a person from Scotland with a brogue might not be able to communicate with a person from Texas with a drawl or with a person from Nigeria with that very clipped speech. But if we all keep to the same grapholect, written rules, than we can still communicate.

ROBERT:

SOME LINGUISTS QUESTION WHETHER THE WRITTEN STANDARD CAN GUARANTEE UNIVERSAL UNDERSTANDING.

BUT THAT'S AN ACADEMIC ISSUE IN THE PRACTICAL WORLD OF NEWSPAPERS.

AMERICA'S MAIN CITY PAPERS PRINT MILLIONS OF WORDS OF COPY EVERY DAY.

AND EVERY ONE OF THOSE WORDS WILL OR SHOULD HAVE BEEN VETTED BY A COPY EDITOR --- BEFORE THE EDITION LANDS ON YOUR PORCH.

ONE OF OHIO'S LEADING PAPERS IS THE *COLUMBUS DISPATCH*. KIRK ARNOTT, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, IS THE LANGUAGE WATCHDOG.

KIRK ARNOTT:

I'm a big believer in informal and conversational language. We should be as conversational as we can be because we want to be as accessible as we can be --- I certainly don't want us to, want us to uh sound like the paper was edited by a school marm. ---- but --- somebody's got to keep the language from sliding into the abyss ---- without policing it, it will tend to slide away from being a useful communication tool.

ROBERT:

Give us some examples of things that you as the, as the language cop have to arrest before they get out.

KIRK ARNOTT:

Uh I see a lot of words that are just downright misused.

ROBERT:

What would be some of those words that you think are misused?

KIRK ARNOTT:

Importantly, when all they mean to say is important but more, more importantly they say. Importantly of course means to, to act as though you're important.

KIRK ARNOTT:

Non-plussed is another one. Uh, the general attitude seems to be that it means unperturbed when in fact it means bewildered. Uh bemused is another one. People seem to think it means amused rather than also bewildered or preoccupied. Those are some of the ones that seem to be most common.

KIRK ARNOTT:

The people, people who work here watch cable TV and listen to the radio and it just, it works its way into their heads.

ROBERT:

AGAIN, THE SPOKEN IS INFLUENCING THE WRITTEN. AND NEWSPAPER COPY IS BEING AFFECTED, OR INFECTED, BY THE SPOKEN JOURNALISM OF RADIO AND TV REPORTERS.

ROBERT:

Not because they're bad journalists.

KIRK ARNOTT:

No no.

ROBERT:

But because their delivery is, is discursive, colloquial, spoken speech and not um and not written and it's a different discipline of writing I think.

KIRK ARNOTT:

It, it certainly is different, oh yes. You just have to know how to pronounce the words.

ROBERT:

Yeah.

KIRK ARNOTT:

No offence.

ROBERT:

I take none.

ROBERT:

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, BIG CITY NEWSPAPERS WORK HARD TO UPHOLD STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN ENGLISH.

WHILE THE LANGUAGE WE SPEAK ON THE STREETS OF OUR CITIES IS, BY ITS VERY NATURE, CHANGEABLE AND SHIFTING.

FOR DECADES BILL LABOV AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE BEEN STUDYING HOW AMERICANS TALK. THE RESULT IS A WHOLE LIBRARY OF RECORDED VOICES AND A FASCINATING DISCOVERY. IT'S CALLED THE "NORTHERN CITIES VOWEL SHIFT."

LABOV BELIEVES THERE IS A REVOLUTIONARY SHIFT IN THE PRONUNCIATION OF SHORT VOWELS THAT HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY STABLE FOR A THOUSAND YEARS.

BILL LABOV:

What we'll be looking at is this mass of cities around the Great Lakes. Uh here we have Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, and Cleveland, Detroit.

ROBERT:

How many people is that?

BILL LABOV:

It's about 34 million people. This area used to be the closest to network pronunciation. It was what the NBC standard was based on. And today it is moving further and further away.

ROBERT:

Let's go into that in some detail. Let's, show us how that's happening.

BILL LABOV:

In these experiments, we played first of all an individual word.

COMPUTER:

Blahck.

BILL LABOV:

And then people had to write down what they thought they heard. So you could do that yourself. What do you hear?

ROBERT:

Black.

BILL LABOV:

And then in another series they heard.

COMPUTER:

Living on one blahck.

BILL LABOV:

Now whatdya hear?

ROBERT:

Block.

BILL LABOV:

Well you change your mind, and…

COMPUTER:

Old senior citizens living on one block.

BILL LABOV:

This person is saying the word block the way they say black.

ROBERT:

THE SHIFT IN THIS ONE VOWEL SEEMS TO HAVE A DOMINO EFFECT ON THE OTHER FOUR VOWELS AND THEY ALL CHANGE TOO. THE RESULT CAN BE SERIOUS MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

BILL LABOV:

Now this is spectacular.

COMPUTER:

Bosses.

BILL LABOV:

Everybody writes down what?

ROBERT:

Bosses.

BILL LABOV:

Right. The guy.

ROBERT:

Yeah.

COMPUTER:

The bosses with the antennas.

BILL LABOV:

Now you begin to wonder. What are these bosses with antennas?

ROBERT:

Bosses with the antennas.

BILL LABOV:

Right.

COMPUTER:

I can remember vaguely when we had the buses with the antennas on the top.

ROBERT:

So buses has become bosses.

BILL LABOV:

Right. And so this is very hard for most people to recognize.

ROBERT:

So is it fair to say that North Americans are, in different regions, are going, growing further apart from each other linguistically?

BILL LABOV:

It seems so. It's hard to believe - everyone says to us, we all watch the same radio and television – how can that be? It's a very suprising finding.

ROBERT:

IN THE 1960'S DETROIT WAS THE HOME OF MOTOWN.

TODAY THERE'S A THRIVING HIP HOP SCENE. EVEN THE WHITE CROSS-OVER RAPPER EMINEM COMES FROM THE AREA CALLED 8-MILE.

INNER CITY DETROIT IS 82% AFRICAN AMERICAN. BUT LANGUAGE CAN DEFINE YOU JUST AS MUCH AS THE COLOR OF YOUR SKIN.

ROBERT:

AT THE MAIN BUS STATION WE MEET JOHN BAUGH, A PROFESSOR OF LINGUISTICS FROM STANFORD UNIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA.

JOHN JOINS US IN DETROIT TO DEMONSTRATE AN EXPERIMENT HE'S BEEN CONDUCTING FOR YEARS, ABOUT HOW AMERICANS REACT TO DIFFERENT ACCENTS.

IT'S CALLED LINGUISTIC PROFILING.

FIRST HE CHECKS THE RENTAL HOUSING SECTION IN THE CITY PAPER. THEN HE CALLS PROPERTIES THAT ARE ADVERTISED FOR RENT.

HE CALLS FIRST USING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN ACCENT.

REALTOR:

May I help you?

JON BAUGH:

Yes, my name is Michael Davis. I was calling to see if you might have any houses for rent that might be available?

ROBERT:

THEN HE CALLS AGAIN, SPEAKING WITH A LATINO ACCENT.

JON BAUGH:

Hello. This is Juan Ramirez. I'm calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper. Yes.

ROBERT:

FINALLY, HE CALLS IN A PERFECTLY NEUTRAL AMERICAN ACCENT, WHICH IS, IN FACT, HOW HE REALLY TALKS.

ROBERT:

What kind of results have you been getting today?

JON BAUGH:

I've actually been getting some mixed results today but…generally speaking the minority dialects do not fair as well and particularly in the affluent communities.

ROBERT:

Is that race or economic class?

JON BAUGH:

It's both - race in and of itself will not be the factor that excludes one from a particular neighbourhood ---- or a house for sale in an affluent community.

ROBERT:

LINGUISTS LIKE BAUGH BELIEVE THE RACISM BEHIND SUCH PREJUDICE SHOWS IGNORANCE OF BLACK HISTORY AND LANGUAGE. THAT HISTORY IS CELEBRATED IN THIS AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM.

THE STORIES OF SLAVERY AND BLACK ENGLISH ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED.

IT'S OFTEN ASSUMED - BY BLACKS AS WELL AS WHITES - THAT AFRICAN AMERICANS SPEAK "BAD" OR "LAZY" ENGLISH.

IN FACT, BLACK ENGLISH HAS ROOTS AS DEEP—-AND A GRAMMAR AS CONSISTENT--AS SCOTTISH, IRISH OR ANY OTHER OF THE ENGLISHES SPOKEN AROUND THE WORLD.

IT WAS THE DREADFUL TRAFFIC IN HUMAN LIVES THAT BROUGHT ENGLISH TO THE COAST OF AFRICA.

BRITISH AND AMERICAN SLAVERS TRADING UP RIVER INTRODUCED THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO THE AFRICAN MIDDLEMEN FROM WHOM THEY BOUGHT THE SLAVES.

TWENTY YEARS AGO WHEN WE FILMED OUR TV SERIES *THE STORY OF ENGLISH*, WE WENT TO AN UPRIVER TRADING POST IN SIERRA LEONE.

300 YEARS AGO BLACKS AND WHITES COMMUNICATED WITH A SIMPLIFIED ENGLISH, KNOWN AS PIDGIN.

JON BAUGH:

The contemporary African American dialects all grew from the trade languages that evolved from slavery.

(African river boatmen)

JON BAUGH:

The language mixing that took place between the African languages and English on the West Coast of Africa for trading purposes still function today.

(African River boatmen)

ROBERT:

THIS ANGLO AFRICAN MIXTURE IS STILL THE LINGUA FRANCA ON THIS RIVER.

RIVER TRADE CARRIED IT DOWN TO THE COAST AND SLAVE DEPOTS.

THIS IS BUNCE ISLAND. THE RUINS OF AN OLD SLAVE FORT STILL STAND HERE.

TO PREVENT REVOLTS, TRADERS MADE SURE THE SLAVES PENNED UP HERE SPOKE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.

TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, THE SLAVES CREATED THEIR OWN PIDGIN. SO EVEN BEFORE THEY LEFT AFRICA, THEY WERE SPEAKING AN ENGLISH THAT WAS ALL THEIR OWN.

JON BAUGH:

And so the slave factories and these trading languages that you've illustrated here are the very origins of contemporary African American English.

ROBERT:

TWENTY YEARS AGO, WHEN WE FILMED OFF THE COAST OF SOUTH CAROLINA YOU COULD STILL HEAR THE FAINT WHISPERS OF SLAVE ENGLISH.

ON THE ISLANDS OF KIOWAH, EDISTO, DAUFUSKIE AND WADAMALAW, OLDER PEOPLE LIKE BENJAMIN BLIGEN AND HIS SISTER JANIE HUNTER STILL SPOKE GULLAH AND GEECHY.

JANIE: (captioned)

All these trees here are medicine.

BENJAMIN:

Yeah,yeah.

JANIE: (captioned)

We're sitting 'neath medicine right now.

BENJAMIN:

Yeah, yeah.

JANIE: (captioned)

All them was medicine. I'm looking at medicine everyday

JANIE: (captioned)

Oh they was good time.

BENJAMIN:

Good times, good times.

JANIE: (captioned)

They time is still here right now but they just don't want to own it.

BENJAMIN:

Oh yeah.

JANIE: (captioned)

But I still old-time and I'll keep my old time ways. Nothing like it.

BENJAMIN:

Oh yeah. Give me that old time religion.

(Singing Old Time Religion)

ROBERT:

WHEN RURAL SOUTHERN BLACKS EVENTUALLY MOVED TO THE CITIES OF THE NORTH, THEY BROUGHT THEIR OWN KIND OF ENGLISH WITH THEM.

THEY'RE YOUNG MEN NOW, BUT TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO, DWAYNE, ASHEEN, AND KIHILEE WERE STUDENTS AT THIS SCHOOL.

SITUATED IN A PROSPEROUS, MOSTLY WHITE SUBURB OF ANN ARBOR, THERE WERE NOT MANY BLACK KIDS AT THE MARTIN LUTHER KING SCHOOL.

WHEN THEY SPOKE AS THEY DID AT HOME – IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH – THEIR TEACHERS SIMPLY ASSUMED THEY COULDN'T DO SCHOOL WORK.

ASHEEN:

They sort of felt like we were unteachable in a sense, I would feel. So it kind of made them go towards other students more and gave them a little bit more help than they would give us.

ROBERT:

Uh-huh. Can you remember some of the things that were said? Teachers would say?

ASHEEN:

Actually um to be honest, the teachers really didn't even communicate with us too much. It just was sort of like, in a sense, that we were on our own.

ROBERT:

Do you remember any of that? You were younger.

KIHILEE:

I was really young but I mean I remember enough to know that I wasn't being treated the same way as all the other kids in the class, or a lot of the other kids. Y'know, that's the irony of it all. It's Martin Luther King's School and, you know, they hadn't learned anything from Martin Luther King. Well hopefully they learned it but they didn't learn it back then.

ROBERT:

THREE MOTHERS WHO REFUSED TO ACCEPT SECOND BEST FOR THEIR SONS.

ROBERT:

Annie what was it that got you and other parents upset enough to bring a lawsuit against the school?

ANNIE:

Um my kids was tested and was tested and was put into special ed classes and I felt like that they were not getting educated and was not treated equally and ---- I felt like that shouldn't be a barrier because of the language to stop them from being educated.

ROBERT:

RUTH ZWEIFLER IS A SOCIAL WORKER, FAMILIAR WITH THE HOUSING PROJECT THE BOYS CAME FROM. LISTENING TO ANNIE TELL HOW HER SON AND HIS FRIENDS WERE FAILING AT SCHOOL, SHE KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

RUTH ZWEIFLER:

There were maybe twenty-four black, poor black children in a sea of affluent white families. And they really were having a very hard time.

ROBERT:

RUTH BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE KIDS WERE BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF THEIR AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENGLISH.

RUTH ZWEIFLER:

Language is the marker for assumed attitudes. Coming with an implied criticism, which is what I think a black child carries with him. We as adults, as mainstream society, as Americans have really done bad by these little kids.

ROBERT:

UNABLE TO MAKE ANY HEADWAY WITH THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, RUTH WENT TO DETROIT. ONE OF THE LAWYERS SHE CONSULTED WAS KEN LEWIS.

THE LEGAL STRATEGY THEY AND OTHERS THRASHED OUT LED TO A LANDMARK COURT DECISION ON BLACK ENGLISH.

KENNETH LEWIS:

Our job was to see if we could come up with some legal theories that made sense that we could pursue on their behalf. The initial thrust of the case was to deal with the children's poverty, as the reason why they were not being educated. There is really no Constitutional right not to be poor in this country. And so trying to find some constitutional provision that would help us along those lines was a futile effort. So language became a part of it. And since that language barrier seemed to impact adversely only on black youngsters, we were able to tie in the race issue.

JOHN BAUGH:

The most significant thing that I believe was raised during that trial was that you had a federal judge acknowledge formally that African American vernacular English represented a significant linguistic barrier to academic achievement and success. He confirmed that the school district was really insensitive to the linguistic background of the vast majority of African American students within the school district.

ROBERT:

YEARS LATER, THE ARGUMENT KEN LEWIS USED IN THIS COURTHOUSE WAS RAISED BY EDUCATORS IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA. BUT THEY CLAIMED BLACK ENGLISH-—WHICH THEY CALLED “EBONICS”--WAS A SEPARATE LANGUAGE. THAT CAUSED A NATIONAL STORM AND, AS WE’LL SEE, IT’S AN ISSUE SCHOOL BOARDS ARE STILL GRAPPLING WITH.

KENNETH LEWIS:

One of the things that I remember Judge Joyner indicating in his opinion was the need to help youngsters appreciate the difference between the language of the majority, how it would impact upon your being perceived by others, that was part of the discussion we had to wrestle with in the Black English case because we thought that the teachers were not respecting the language as it should have been.

ROBERT:

If a young black who talked like Puff Daddy applied for a job in this law firm would he get it?

KENNETH LEWIS:

The reality is he has to fit the criteria, the skills that are required for this particular job. Just like if I wanted to go on the radio and become the commentator for the R & B rap, hip hop station, I'm going to have to change my language skills because I got a, a different audience I'm appealing to. I'm wrestling with it now with my own fifteen year old who, you know, communicates to me in language that I'm not necessarily sure I understand. But I'm, I'm working on it I'm, I'm, I'm finding I'm coming full circle with this thing called Black English. [laughter]

ROBERT:

THIS IS THE HIP HOP CREW ATHLETIC MIC LEAGUE.

SOME ARE COLLEGE KIDS, WHO CAN TALK STANDARD AMERICAN, BUT AMONG THEMSELVES THEY SPEAK “STREET TALK”.

IN LANGUAGE, AS IN MUSIC AND FASHION, IT’S THE STREET THAT INFLUENCES THE MAINSTREAM.

(Performance)

WESLEY:

Everything follows the streets in, in America. So whatever's going on there it goes from here to here then eventually mainstream America which is, you know, which is White America.

ROBERT:

BEFORE THEY GO ON STAGE THE CREW REHEARSE BITS OF THEIR ROUTINE.

(Rehearsal)

ROBERT:

CLASSIC FEATURES OF URBAN BLACK ENGLISH INCLUDE “WE GOING” INSTEAD OF “WE ARE GOING.”

“HE START” INSTEAD OF “HE STARTS.”

AND “WE BE GOING” FOR A HABITUAL ACTION.

BUT ANOTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF BLACK ENGLISH IS ITS LOVE OF PLAYING WITH WORDS.

SPINNING NEW MEANINGS OUT OF WORDS LIKE STACKED, LIVE, VIBING, SICK AND ILL.

TRES:

Coming down ---I'm edgy --- about what I'm about to walk into --- I hope the place is stacked. I hope that the audience is live. I hope when I step out this door that they are ready and anxious, you know to hear us do what we've got to do --- they gonna feel us --- are they gonna connect with us?

(Performance)

TRES:

You got to come out there confident --- for me it's almost on the borderline of being cocky. --- You get on stage and all of a sudden you've got that connection you're vibing.

(Performance)

<>**WESLEY:**

This whole game is just, is based on how ill you are. For how sick a cat can be…

TRES:

Yup.

WESLEY:

Sometimes it's about finesse, sometimes we’re just on there spitting and just trying and be as raw as we can be on stage. ---- And so you have to rock as hard as you can. So you, you're recognised as the best, you got to look, listen, move, and yeah really feel it. And that’s that’s when we, that’s how we judge crowds. Other people will judge a crowd different.

(Performance)

ROBERT:

THESE HIP HOP ARTISTS DRAW ON LOCAL STREET TALK FOR THEIR LYRICS AND POETRY.

(Performance)

WESLEY:

We use the word nasty for everything. When somebody was on, on stage and they were really you know, they were really getting off, they were rocking the crowd. You're like “he was nasty, his flow was nasty” or…

(Performance)

TRES:

We have a saying --- pro nasty, professionally nasty, that means it's quality, this is, this is, this is not just good…

WESLEY:

That's our grade A that's our…

TRES:

This is, this is, this is the top.

WESLEY:

That's our professional grade.

TRES:

If you want the best and you want the top you want something from us that's pro nasty.

ROBERT:

NASTY, PRONASTY, SICK AND RAW - HIP HOP AND RAP ARE FORCING NEW MEANINGS INTO AMERICAN ENGLISH.

AND IF YOU’VE NEVER HEARD THESE WORDS USED LIKE THIS BEFORE, YOU PROBABLY WILL SOON.

(Performance)

Bumper and Tease:

NARRATOR:

Stay tuned – Do You Speak American? will be right back.

NARRATOR:

Coming up. Mosey on down to the heart of the South.

TOMMY TAYLOR:

Down home, where I'm from, Tennessee and Kentucky both they claim me. Tennessee claims I'm from Kentucky and Kentucky claims I'm from Tennessee.

NARRATOR:

Here you can sample some spicy Cajun. Or try some straight-shooting Texas talk.

MOLLY IVINS:

His pants was so tight if he'd a farted it would've blowed his boots off.

NARRATOR:

So saddle on up – it's a journey like no other. Coming up on Do You Speak American?

On-Air Offer:

NARRATOR:

Do You Speak American? is available on DVD for $69.95 or VHS for $59.95. A companion book is available for $24.95 plus shipping. To order call 1-800-336-1917 or write to the address on your screen.

PBS System Cue:

NARRATOR:

PBS will return in a moment.

- *Do You Speak American?*