

Middle-Class African American English

African American English (AAE) is a major area of research in linguistics, but until now, work has primarily been focused on AAE as it is spoken amongst the working classes. From its historical development to its contemporary context, this is the first full-length overview of the use and evaluation of AAE by middle-class speakers, giving voice to this relatively neglected segment of the African American speech community. Weldon offers a unique first-person account of middle-class AAE, and highlights distinguishing elements such as codeswitching, camouflaged feature usage, Standard AAE, and talking/sounding “Black” versus “Proper.” Readers can hear authentic excerpts and audio prompts of the language described through a wide range of audio files, which can be accessed directly from the book’s pages using QR technology or through the book’s online Resource Tab. Engaging and accessible, it will help students and researchers gain a broader understanding of both the African American speech community and the AAE continuum.

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For my children
Christian and Rupert
And in memory of my dad
Paul Isaiah Weldon
1933–2019

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within

—James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

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Finally, to all speakers of African American English, from all walks of life, I offer the faithful words of author and activist James Weldon Johnson . . .

Lift ev’ry voice and sing
 Till earth and heaven ring
 Ring with the harmonies of liberty

xviii Acknowledgments

Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won