

The Detroit Dialect Study: Accessing a foundational study on the social stratification of American English

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Abstract (200 words)

The Detroit Dialect Study (DDS) is one of the earliest foundational studies of social stratification in American English and the most expansive survey of an urban area ever undertaken in sociolinguistics. The DDS, led by Dr. Roger Shuy, systematically gathered and analyzed data to determine the linguistic patterns at play across race, sex, social class, and age, and the results of this study have informed work on educational policy regarding vernacular American English dialects. At the same time, the DDS allows for deeper insights into the development of African American Language and the spread of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift at a much greater time-depth than current digitized collections, essential for linguists interested in the mechanisms of language variation and change over time.

In this audio feature, we discuss the newly digitized and publicly available Detroit Dialect Study with original audio from the DDS to highlight linguistic patterns and important stories. We also include audio interviews with sociolinguists Roger Shuy, Walt Wolfram, and Ralph Fasold, who

were all involved with the DDS. We hope to highlight the rich data available within, as well as different ways the dataset can be used today.

Keywords: Detroit, African American Language, Northern Cities Vowel Shift, Dialectology, Sociolinguistics, Language Change

Narrator: During the summers of 1966 and 1967, 13 field workers gathered interviews from 728 Detroiters in what is now recognized as the most expansive survey of an urban area ever undertaken in sociolinguistics as well as one of the foundational studies of social stratification in American English. The Detroit Dialect Study, or DDS, systematically gathered and analyzed data to determine the linguistic patterns at play across ethnicity, sex, social class, and age, and the results have informed work on educational policy regarding vernacular American English dialects.

Fifty years after the study was conducted, the Language & Life Project (LLP) at NC State University and Online Resources for African American Language (ORAAL) at the University of Oregon were awarded a \$28,000 grant from the Council of Library and Information Resources' Recordings at Risk program to digitize the DDS interviews. The LLP and ORAAL worked with audiovisual preservation experts at the MediaPreserve to borrow the collection from storage at Georgetown University Library's Booth Family Center for Special Collections (at which time it was discovered that 7 of the 728 are presumed lost) in order to reformat and safeguard the recordings. Additional funding provided by Walt Wolfram at NC State University enabled staff and students to process and redact personal information from each interview thus facilitating public access to these recordings.

The entire DDS collection is now accessible online via the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project (SLAAP) and a subset of interviews with African American speakers, fully transcribed with associated metadata, is available through the Corpus of Regional African American Language (CORAAL). Given that the content of these interviews contains significant historic data that may be of interest to the broader public, the majority of the recordings have also been made available for spontaneous discovery as a collection on Archive.org.

Because of their temporal and cultural context, these recordings are of critical importance to Linguistics, including the specific area of African American Language (AAL). African American subjects are featured in 326 of the 721 digitized interviews: the largest sociolinguistic collection of Black speech recorded in a single community. This collection allows for deeper insights into the development of AAL at a much greater time-depth than current digitized collections, essential for linguists interested in the mechanisms of language variation and change across time. Advances in retrieval, measurement, and analysis technology now make it possible to incorporate a large collection of data, such as the DDS corpus, in contemporary studies. Indeed, having such a point of comparison will help to answer long-standing questions about the development of AAL and the relationship to local white English varieties during the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north.

At the same time, these recordings can help us to better understand the development of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift (NCVS) among white speakers, who account for 395 interviews in the digitized collection. The Northern Cities Vowel Shift developed in cities like Detroit, Chicago, Rochester, NY during the mid-20th century. While later work, such as Eckert (1990) focuses on

the latter stages of the vowel shift, previous work has not been able to track the inception of the shift. In the DDS, with multiple generations from the same families represented, along with folks from different parts of Detroit and of different social classes, we can begin to understand how the NCVS made its way through the wider community.

This American Speech Audio Feature comprises audio from the original Detroit recordings as well as two interviews that were recorded a half century later to reflect on and contextualize the original project recordings. In July of 2020, Charlie Farrington and Danica Cullinan helped facilitate a conversational interview between Roger Shuy and Walt Wolfram. Roger Shuy was a professor at Michigan State University in the mid 1960s when he submitted a proposal for the Detroit Dialect Study for funding and then assumed the role of Principal Investigator. Walt Wolfram was then a graduate student who served as a fieldworker for the project. In August of 2024 Farrington and Cullinan helped facilitate a conversational interview between Ralph Fasold and Walt Wolfram. Ralph Fasold worked extensively with the interview recordings in years following the project. Co-authors Amelia Han, Chloe Tacata and Marissa Morgan all assisted in the redaction of the original Detroit interviews and in identifying interesting and linguistically illustrative passages that have been incorporated into the audio feature. The piece is narrated by me, Danisha Baker-Whitaker, a native Detroiter.

In the following passage from the July 2020 interview, Shuy recalls the impetus for the study to Walt Wolfram

SW1 Roger Shuy:

This all came together for me in the summer of 1964 at this linguistic summer of the LSA summer linguistic institute - at that institute there were people like Labov and Charles Ferguson and Bill Wright and uh- a number of other linguists and they all seemed- and John Gumperz and they all had the same idea that language had a social context that was not very studied very much and we got together and had a couple of meetings and i think that was the birthplace of sociolinguistics that summer uh at least the time at any rate uh i went back to Michigan State and decided hey that stuff is good i'm going to teach a grad course in sociolinguistics of course i had no idea what sociolinguistics course would look like so we just sort of created one. and in the process i decided that our students would develop a- a kind of pre-proposal to give the US Office of Education to study the city of Detroit, why Detroit? It was nearby for one thing it was a city that was very uh typical of big cities in terms of population of minorities and incoming migrants and beginning to decay and things like that and uh. So we wrote the proposal and then I gave it or sent it to the office of education with the idea that the research that we found would have some implications some uses for- for minority kids and schools. That's why education part. And it did and it was funded and suddenly in the fall of '65 i had to put together a group of people to do it,

Narrator: Funded by what was then called the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the broad objectives of this study were: 1. To describe the specialized linguistic features of the various English speaking sub-cultures of Detroit. 2. To determine the most

efficient methods of language data gathering in an urban area. 3. To determine effective methods of language data storage, retrieval and analysis. 4. To provide accurate and useful language data upon which educational applications can be based.

The project sought a large stratified sample of residents, newcomers and natives that would represent a cross section of the people of Detroit. Informed by a combination of census data and the previous work of sociologists, the study drew participants from ten geographic areas of Detroit: within these areas, elementary schools were used as a starting point to recruit speakers who would be joined by older family members to yield a "Base Sample." An "Ethnic Sample" was soon added to incorporate areas of linguistic interest that were not covered by the Base Sample.

SW2 Roger Shuy: *first of all we- we- we drew a map of the city and- and found different areas in it that were equal and got information from the city, Detroit city schools about names of people who lived in those districts who had kids. So we get old people and their kids at the same time we're adults and kids and set out a list of places to go and then research assistant went out and talked to the people ahead of time and got them to agree to let us come in which was a big handicap we overcame immediately i think we got about 95 percent agreement to uh to- to carry out the interviews there okay that was the summer of 66' is that right Walt?*

Walt Wolfram *Yes i believe it was or was it- yeah 66. Yeah*

Roger Shuy: *And to get this to work done with 12 people over the summer of 66 I knew we had to have a hotel so the grant included hotel rooms for the for the field workers and we needed cars and i gave used one of mine and uh maybe two, I'm not sure. i can't remember now i had two cars an old old volkswagen i remember I was surprised it worked. And uh the university provided a car and I forgot where the other one was but we'd send out field workers in team three- three per car, twice a day and come back in the evening and with our tapes we gave them all good Uher tape recorders it would look state-of-the-art at the time. And each were provided with tapes of course and went out and did the field work and by the end of the summer we had gotten about 700, 706, or something like that, interviews.*

SW3 Walt Wolfram *But yeah but one of the one of the things that uh- uh that was sort of remarkable is everything was sort of very well scheduled so we'd sort of get our assignment for the day and get in our car and go to uh. I remember a few occasions we did three interviews which was a little more stressful. To me uh to me the the most stressful part of it is when the interviews were done we were supposed to go home at night and transcribe the lexical portion.*

Roger Shuy: *Remember that wild idea i had*

Walt Wolfram *yeah which was which turned out to be uh an almost insurmountable task uh you know and the point of it we wanted to get it ready to codify so it could be used for computational analysis but uh. As it turned out sort of uh I for one wasn't always confident of other people's transcription. And so so that became it was a bit i- i don't want to call it a failure but uh but we got minimal sort of uh productivity out of that because we were still transcribing impressionistically, you have a range of sort of expertise and background and so forth and so uh that was the one thing that stressed me out sort of getting the phonetics done at night and getting ready for the interview.*

Roger Shuy: *it was overwhelming it was ambitious it was naively ambitious the whole project i think but to get anything out of it was was amazing and we got a lot out of it I think Detroit was nearby, it was unstudied and there hadn't been a study other than Labov's study of New York no no work had been done intensively on a city like that before.*

Narrator: To Shuy, the DDS was an overly ambitious study, but it would later be revealed that Detroit was an ideal location for an intensive study: there was a lot of population change, with in-migration from the American South, out-migration of whites to the suburbs, and long-standing ethnic populations (like Polish Americans). Wolfram and Shuy discuss how the research methods allowed for an impressive view of language change.

SW4Walt Wolfram *But when you think of it there are a couple of things that were really novel though.*

First of all sort of like recording spontaneous conversations was something that hadn't been done uh very much and- and wasn't utilized all that much. Uh so that so that was it. And then that getting more than one member of a family that we had multi-dimensional uh- multi-generational families was really a big step forward, you know.

Roger Shuy: *Sometimes a child, a parent, and a grandparent.*

Walt Wolfram *Yeah so so that was really novel for studying uh language change and so forth.*

Narrator: Multigenerational family units can also help us understand language change, with a couple linguistic changes that were evolving in real time in Detroit in the 1960s. The Northern Cities Vowel Shift, one of the most well-studied chain shifts in modern English, was a change in progress at the time of fieldwork.

SW5Walt Wolfram *And- and actually one of the things that sort of in- in retrospect is that you know so much has been made of sort of the Great- he Northern Cities Vowel shift and actually it was in a rough paper that was never published that uh that Ralph Fasold actually outlined the primary changes of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift which turns out to be sort of an invaluable kind of foundational study that people can look back on.*

Narrator: Dr Ralph Fasold is emeritus professor of sociolinguistics at Georgetown University and a former classmate of Wolfram's and student of Shuy's at Wheaton College. All three of them worked together at the Center of Applied Linguistics soon after the completion of the DDS. In this interview from August 2024 with Walt Wolfram, , Fasold recalls working with the DDS tapes and his interest in the Northern Cities Vowel shift:

FW1Ralph Fasold: *I listened to these speakers I forget how many there were but not that many and I discovered that none of them had all three vowels shifted, and so I wrote a long letter to Bill Labov saying you know I thought there might be something here with the vowels are shifting around but I've done some preliminary research on that and I think I can show that there's no such thing*

I said because there there are no speakers who have all of these shifted vowels you know some have one or two the other have another one, some just have one so I think we can give up on that idea and he wrote back and said wait a minute sometimes it takes one part of the system a long time to figure out what another part is doing.

FW2Walt Wolfram: *you know my my explanation of that is that was an early stage of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift and so it it wasn't complete in lots of folks and as I recall none of us detected the backing of [ɛ] and so forth that went that eventually went along with it, right?*

Ralph Fasold: right I never did that time

Walt Wolfram: I never did you know it could have been our lack of perception but none of us really heard it and so so so my conclusion sort of post facto was that well that was early and that was a later development.

SW5.5Walt Wolfram (from SW interview): *Now that we have advances in technology so that we can do sort of uh automatic retrieval and so forth i i think the the value of that study in the early stages of the sound shift were- are just going to be monumental as we go forward with this digitized data I think that's really an important study. to say nothing of sort of the other variables over time and sort of uh the the first study of African-American English in terms of social stratification.*

Narrator: As an example, the reading passage, *Nobody Knows Your Name*, initially developed by Bill Labov for his New York City study, includes several vowels implicated in the Northern Cities Vowel Shift. Each of the DDS interviewees read this passage as part of their interview.

We will hear two excerpts, paying particular attention to the /æ/ vowel in *last* and *basketball*, and the /ɑ/ vowel in *shot* and *drop*. The first speaker, DDS274, is a 36 year old (born in 1930) white woman from the Winship area in Detroit. Her /æ/ vowels are low and monophthongal and her /ɑ/ vowels are backed.

Speaker DDS274, white female: *Last year I went out for the basketball team, and I made out better than I expected. I wasn't too big, but I was quick on my feet, and my jump shot used to drop in when it counted. The coach told me himself I was a real help to the school.*

Narrator: The second speaker, DDS686, a ten year old boy from the Winship area. His parents were also born in Detroit. His vowel system represents the Northern Cities Shift. His /æ/ vowels are diphthongal and raised and his /ɑ/ vowel is fronted.

Speaker DDS686, white female: *Last year I went out for the basketball team, and I made out better than I expected. I wasn't too big, but I was quick on my feet, and my jump shot used to drop in when it counted. The coach told me himself I was a real help to the school.*

Narrator: When asked in 2024 about this early research and data analysis, Ralph Fasold said:

Ralph Fasold: *I think is pretty damn good stuff you know considered considering what we knew then and uh the fact that you know interviewing techniques were still developing and we didn't have the acoustic and the statistical tools then and so uh I think we we did some pretty solid*

work and uh although we had to do it perceptually which was about all you had uh so uh and and I think it stood up fairly well you know giving or taking a few inaccuracies.

Narrator: He goes on to discuss one of the issues with both the DDS and his later work in Washington DC (which also features Roger Shuy and Walt Wolfram as fieldworkers and collaborators):

FW3Ralph Fasold: *The social class system that was used from sociology uh where you use social class properties you know what is it what neighborhood do they live in, what what um what uh uh education do they have, what is their income, what is their occupation, and then you assign numbers to all these and added them up and weighted them in various ways and what the number came out to be that was this person's social class and they got placed into they got into they got into the that category using those faulty criteria. Now they were out of date even you know in the late 60s when we were working, but I didn't know any other way to do it so I used it anyway and then we followed I'm ashamed to admit the horribly sexist procedure of assigning women their husband's social class number and in many places in the Black community in DC, there were women who had College education, who married working class men and we were giving them their husband's number when they had a college education. I'm surprised that it worked as well as it did in the sense that the people we call lower working class actually predominantly had the features that we intuitively would have assigned to that uh to that stratum of speaker.*

Narrator: Despite the issues Fasold discussed with social class placement, these recordings allow a unique sociohistorical and sociolinguistic view of the social context of Detroit, Michigan in 1966 and 1967. At the time of the recordings, the African American population was increasing as a result of the Great Migration and would reach a majority within the city less than ten years later, while the white population was dropping dramatically.

SW6Walt Wolfram *One of the things that that we forget is this was still during the period of great migration so- so in order i don't remember interviewing an older African American who didn't come from the south i mean basically at that point in the 1960s most people over 50 migrated from Mississippi or one of the deep south areas to Detroit and so sort of our uh we were unable to get lots of uh speakers, who were born older African Americans who were born in that area which which is also important in terms of sort of the influence of southern speech.*

Narrator: The following speaker, DDS645 (part of the CORAAL: Detroit 1966 collection, CORAAL code DTA_se2_ag4_f_02), born in 1903, discusses her migration story from the south to Detroit:

DTA_int_08 Where were you born?

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 I was born in Cuba, Alabama.

DTA_int_08 Uh-huh.

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 /Cubie/- and, um, um, I'm- I remember papa lived in, um, at Cuba and that's all the address that I knowed, was route one box ninety-seven. All I ever remember, you know. Uh, at Cuba. And, uh, my sister's here and she real sick, and she said we- say we used to live in Lauderdale before we're, um, you know, too. Lauderdale, Mississippi. But I wasn't born in Lauderdale. I-

DTA_int_08 [Mm-hm.]

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 [I] was born in, um, Cuba, Alabama. All I know. And I know that the, um, date was, um, nineteen-o-three. I know they'd always- they always would tell when it was we born, you know.

DTA_int_08 [Mm-hm.]

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 [But] I can't remember the address of what we had. No more, Cuba, Alabama. I guess they got their-

DTA_int_08 [Oh.]

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 they didn't have no house number something [like that.]

DTA_int_08 [Mm.] Mm-hm. Where else have you lived?

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 Hm?

DTA_int_08 Where else have you lived?

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 Where else have I lived beside, uh? Well I lived in- from Cuba to Laurel, Mississippi, and came back to Bessemer, Alabama, and came from there here.

DTA_int_08 How many years have you been here?

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 <ts> Well I came here in- in nineteen, um, s- nineteen sixty-two.

DTA_int_08 You've been in Detroit three years?

DTA_se2_ag4_f_02 Mm-hm.

Narrator: Wolfram and Shuy continue to discuss an area of Detroit that reflected population change resulting from the Great Migration.

SW7Walt Wolfram *In the Brewster Projects which we visited while we were filming for Talking Black in America and exists no more and what is what I was impressed with about the Brewster Projects. Okay so there were i don't know six to eight buildings and they were like 10 to 12 stories high and there were like 8 000 people there.*

Roger Shuy: *The projects*

Walt Wolfram *There were about 8 000 people, but the size of the projects, it was like an empty football field when it was- when it was raised and there were 8 000 people there. Uh you know virtually all of whom were African-American and I can remember uh this gentleman uh kindly taking me aside when i was sitting out on a bench by myself as the only white person there uh and saying you know i don't know if a man of your color should be and he would refer to african-americans as colored he'd come from mississippi and so forth and and wondering if i would be okay and why i was just sitting there as a lone white person in- in the sea of the projects which were so densely african-american and sort of in that context it really helps you*

understand how african-american english could change and strengthen in terms of its solidarity for African Americans in that context. You know which was a kind of segregation that just wasn't experienced in the- in the South with that sort of density of African Americans in a particular urban context.

Narrator: Interviewers often asked kids about their friendship groups, specifically about racial makeup. One young interviewee, DDS565, a Black female (CORAL code DTA_se1_ag1_f_01), was discussing her friends with the interviewer:

DTA_int_03 are any of 'em white?

DTA_se1_ag1_f_01 Nope.

DTA_int_03 Nope. Not a one.

DTA_se1_ag1_f_01 Mm- it's none of 'em live here.

DTA_int_03 Yeah. Yeah. So they told me there was some white people over- over that a way. /But I-/.

DTA_se1_ag1_f_01 Oh, but I don't go over there. [I don't] d- over there?

DTA_int_03 [Mm-hm.] Yeah.

DTA_se1_ag1_f_01 1539.8001 It [is?]

DTA_int_03 1540.0167 [/unintelligible/]

DTA_se1_ag1_f_01 1540.4761 [I know-] I- I- I know a white boy. He nice.

Narrator: Sociocultural observations and personal sentiments within the DDS interviews help to set the cultural stage for the tumultuous summer that saw the Detroit Riot of 1967: a series of violent confrontations between residents of predominantly African American neighborhoods of Detroit and the city's police department over the course of 5 days at the end of July. DDS fieldwork began in the summer of 1966, at which point there were already significant indicators of social unrest. In the spring of 1966, for example, 2000 students protested racism in a Northern Detroit high school.

SW8Walt Wolfram *Yeah i i do think i do think that- that the racial tension was there uh you know. At that point I would probably describe myself as a relatively naive white boy. Uh who thought that sort of a a sort of genuine spirit of interest and concern would be adequate you know and so I- I didn't really view it to the extent that it probably existed i do remember this what was peculiar was people coming to homes simply to interview not to sell anything and i can remember walking up to porches and people greeting us at the door saying I don't care what you say we're not buying anything. Because the whole context of simply sitting down for interviews with people was probably a little strange particularly to sort of like working-class people who were not geared towards that kind of endeavor and so- and so we were often greeted with suspicion as sort of we were that that our stated interests were not our real interests and so sort of we were we're confused with sort of uh people who thought we were*

trying to sell the com- the tape recorders or other sort of material objects. So that was a little strange because because ordinary citizens are not used to people coming around and just interviewing them for the joy of interviewing them

Roger Shuy: in a way though the fact that we were a bit naive about the impending race we- blow up uh may have worked to our advantage because that was pretty clear that we were not there to put it down or to worry about something or to advise them about it or anything like that

Walt Wolfram yeah I- I do remember I do remember a couple of interviews with white people where we were talking about different relationships and so forth and they became very cautious about us and I can remember one person I don't know uh she mentioned something about race i asked a follow-up question simply to keep the conversation going and she completely shut down and said the interview's over because I had touched on a sensitive topic to her. So- so there were occasions like that you know we sort of packed up and left then and uh you know walked out of the house saying, oh i guess that was a little more sensitive than they were ready for we were just sort of following up a question but but that that sort of uh response certainly is indicative, but to be honest i felt that the white people in the subject pool were a little more exasperated about racial tensions than the african americans. That was you know that was my personal impression.

Roger Shuy: Interesting

Narrator: In the clips from the original DDS interviews that follow, resident adults, both white and Black, talk about their observations related to demographic changes.

Int: Were there any Negroes at that time?

DDS003 (40 year-old white female): No there were not at that time. But they began moving in, you know, at that time, the- the time about that I left was when the Negroes started moving in, in that area.

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Int: Has- is the characteristic of this neighborhood changed?

DDS005 (36 year-old, white female): I think it is now lately um we have course the Negro ... influx. We don't have any on this particular block but we're- we have them on other blocks around us.

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DDS050 (11 year-old, white female): well I lived on [STREET] once but then we moved around the block (.) and we might move again because this neighborhood's changing.

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Int: What do you call this part of town?

DDS029 (14 year-old white female): Well- well I call it Highland Park but a lot of people call it HARlem park because it uh resembles Harlem you know I mean (laughing) some parts of it are very bad but uh this is a nicer neighborhood if you crossed Hamilton it would get very very bad.

Narrator: At the same time, older Black participants often discussed similarities and differences from growing up in the South.

Int: Did they say it was better for a person of color to be in the north, or?

DDS568 (54 year-old, Black female): No, no one told me that.

Int: Is it - do you think so, or?

DDS568: I used to, but I doesn't anymore.

Narrator: Participant DDS232 (CORAAAL:DTA DTA_se2_ag4_m_01), a male born in 1911 and working as an inspector in 1966, offered a similar perspective:

DTA_int_09 What do you think of all these goings on in- in Selma now?

DTA_se2_ag4_m_01 <ts> Well this is something that should have taken place years ago.

DTA_int_09 About a hundred years ago huh?

DTA_se2_ag4_m_01 Well it did take place a hundred years ago, but it didn't last long.

DTA_int_09 Uh-huh.

DTA_se2_ag4_m_01 I think it lasted only, what? About, uh, down the Reconstruction era, I [think that] was about

DTA_int_09 [/inaudible/]

DTA_se2_ag4_m_01 I j- don't remember how long it last, but it was until the peoples in the North and the peoples in the South decided they didn't want this or that. A lot of people think, which it is true that, uh, those peoples in the South is worse than some of the peoples in the North, but I don't think so. Because I've had contact with the lot, they'll laugh and run with you, but they'll cut your throat behind your back. Those peoples in the South gonna come out and tell you if they like you or whether they [don't.]

DTA_int_09 [Uh-huh.] Uh, that's pretty true.

(2372-2453)

Narrator: In the fall of 1967, Wolfram returned to Detroit to complete a final set of interviews with young upper middle class Black participants, which brought back some memories of political opinions that came up around the interviews

SW9Walt Wolfram *it was also very interesting to go back after the riot had taken place and interview folks i can remember uh riding buses around the city and the people i was interviewing were appalled that this white man was down there riding buses and in many instances they would tell me no you're not riding a bus i'm going to take you to your next interview we're not going to be responsible for you out there i'm taking you where are you going so people are very gracious.*

Roger Shuy: *but i do remember some of the middle class i'm sorry working class whites as well right were fascinating- remember the guy that we asked him about leaders and he said "I don't want no leader the leaders we got don't mean nothing why a man gets up to power he changes he just change"*

Walt Wolfram: *Yeah. That's- that's pretty pertinent at this time.*

Speaker DDS180 (55 year-old white working class male): *I don't want no leader! The leaders we got don't mean nothing. When- when a man gets up to position, you know, like he- like he used to be a leader, there's something that happens to him. He changes! He can be the most God-fearing man you see- He just changes. He's got power behind it and he's gonna use it.*

Narrator: After the initial data collection in the summer of 1966, Wolfram went back to collect more data, with primarily middle class teens, the following year. He subsequently analyzed just 60 of the 728 recordings for his dissertation, which was later published in 1969 as *A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech*, through the Center for Applied Linguistics, but there were several other books and manuscripts that resulted from this impressive dataset. Charlie Farrington solicits Shuy's perspective on the subject.

SW10Charlie Farrington: *So what do you think of the outcomes from that project?*

Roger Shuy: *Well i think immediate outcomes were*

Roger Shuy: *What book Detroit Neighborhood Speech the one you were mentioning a minute ago. Baratz' and Shuy's Teaching Black Children to Read. Fasold and Shuy Teaching Standard English in the Inner City. Walt Wolfram and Nona Clark Black White Speech Relationships. And shortly after that Language Attitudes Current Trends and Prospects by Shuy and Fasold at Georgetown for us. So. and but we did get stuff put out fast for that too thanks to CAL the ones i just showed you these books and articles and directions of lives different than before i think we've we found a number of people fascinated students and others about the fact that there is such things as language variation and it does affect age and race and sex and everything else. And that i think it was instrumental in the development of sociolinguistics as a whole.*

Narrator: The DDS contains 395 white participants, 326 Black participants, 452 females, and 269 males. Ages range from 9 (born in 1957) to 89 (born in 1877). Metadata typically includes information about social status, length of residency, birthplace of participants, parents and grandparents, as well as detailed technical information from The MediaPreserve about digitization.

Typically, each interview consists of Side A (sociolinguistic interview) and Side B (short response and reading passage). The sociolinguistic interview questionnaire (complete details can be found in *Field Techniques in an Urban Language Study* (Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley 1967) follow the style of Labov's questionnaire from New York City.

The DDS was digitized by The MediaPreserve in 2019. In the years following, a group of linguists and research assistants at North Carolina State University and the University of Oregon worked to redact personal identifiable information from each of the interviews.

The full content of the recordings is unknown since the vast majority remain un-transcribed and never analyzed. But from what we have heard, these interviews contain a wealth of information relevant to many different fields of study including history, sociology, economics, politics,

folklore, African American studies and linguistics. We are hopeful that these or other fields of study might use this corpus and have publicized its availability via Archive.org.

Wolfram and Shuy consider the data's value for linguists today.

FW4Walt Wolfram: *Well to me you know the interesting thing about historical moments is they're not historical at the time that they're taking place they're just sort of progressive moments uh and- and that's what we were doing. It's it's only sort of the focus of sort of where the field has gone over the last you know over a half century that sort of makes this uh sort of unique corpus that Roger envisioned sort of one of the most important sets of data that we still have in sociolinguistics and the idea uh at that point data was something that you collected and weren't sure what you did with it afterward. I think going forward we're going to get a lot more out of it too as people go back and examine sort of a large corpora in terms of their potential data*

Ralph Fasold: *back in the day there was there was a young woman who was I think she was a grad student at Howard and she said I have all these tapes so uh could you run through a machine and get the transcriptions out I said no that is absolutely impossible it's unthinkable I don't think you'll ever be able to do that and she couldn't believe it she thought it would be you know quite easy to do but still it seems like magic to me what you guys can do now*

Narrator: With that in mind, there are several potential directions this large archive of recordings could benefit researchers. As discussed previously, from a sociolinguistic point of view, this dataset offers a window into the early stages of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift. It also offers a window into the processes of new dialect formation as urban African American Language was developing out of rural southern African American Language. Modern techniques like automatic transcription are not yet perfect, but we could imagine looking at the demographic information (location in city, generation in Detroit, social network analysis, etc.) to inform processes of linguistic change.

In the following excerpts from the reading passage, we present five members of the same family, who were categorized by Shuy as lower middle class based on the father's (dds093) job as a detective.

Nobody Knows Your Name

DDS195 (78 year-old Black female)

Last year I went out for the basketball team, and I made out better than I expected. I wasn't too big, but I was quick on my feet, and my jump shot used to drop in when it counted. The coach told me himself I was a real help to the school.

But you couldn't tell that to Eleanor. No matter if I did good or bad, she'd ask me after every game, why can't you be the man to put it in the basket? I'd tell her, Look, Eleanor, Everybody can't be a star. I'm not a forward, I'm not a center, I'm a guard. I play the back court.

DDS093 (54 year-old Black male)

But you passed it to Lester again, she used to say, you must have passed it to Lester sixty times, and he missed it most of the time. Why don't you make the shots? It's easy enough to explain, I told her, if you only know what's what. Lester is seven foot two, I'm five foot ten. He just twists his wrist and puts it in.

She wouldn't see it, and I couldn't make her see it. I'd talk till I was out of breath, but I might as well have kept my mouth shut. It was always something if it wasn't this thing, it was that thing, or the other thing. I'd tell her again, Look Eleanor, I'm a guard. I play the back court.

DDS055 (52 year old Black female)

Then she tried a new line. I know you're right, she said. But what about my pride? I don't think any of my friends remember if you're a center or an end or a tackle. Nobody knows your name.

She made my blood boil. I said I wasn't going to hog the ball to please her. I was ready for murder or worse. And she said she wouldn't go out with me any more if I didn't score a lot of points. So I told the coach about it. He said, Artie, everybody can't be a star. You're a good team man. It should be an easy game tomorrow night, so we'll keep setting you up.

DDS128 (13 year-old Black male)

They fixed me up to look good all right. I just hung under the basket and everybody passed me the ball. I pushed the easy ones in, and nobody noticed when I missed. By the end of the game, I had thrown in thirty three points. The whole school was cheering for me. Everybody was shouting my name.

Everybody that is, but Eleanor. I looked for her here, there, everywhere, but there wasn't hide nor hair of her. Finally I called her father on the phone. I just made thirty three points, Mister Jones, but I can't find Eleanor. Do you know where she is?

DDS008 (11 year-old Black female)

Her father said, just a minute. Then he said, she says she can't come to the phone right now, son. She's watching the Dave Clark Five on Channel Two. But she says, will you please do it for her again next week, she can watch you then.

Next year, I'm going out for the swimming team, under water. Down there, nobody, but nobody, is going to know my name.

Narrator: The audio from the DDS is available through the Internet Archive (collection: Detroit Dialect Study), complete audio files (including reading passages) are available upon request via the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project, and a subset of the DDS is available, fully transcribed, through the Corpus of Regional African American Language. It is our hope that researchers continue to use this impressive dataset for years to come. Both Roger Shuy and Walt Wolfram, among the founders of sociolinguistics, offer their final comments on the DDS:

SW11 **Walt Wolfram:** *But did you feel satisfied that we had uh gotten- accomplished the sort of goals of what we set out to do*

Roger Shuy: *I think so. I think- i think it moved the field of sociolinguistics in a direction that Bill had started Bill Labov again in New York. We extended and did a larger study in Detroit and from then on there have been lots of studies but I think it was a monument along the way. Probably still valuable but- but definite change agent at the time. Overly optimistic is not always bad you know. If you're when you're optimistic and get 90 percent of what you want to get done that's pretty good.*