

AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE)

for 19th and early 20th century

developed for the cast of *The 24th*

by [Paul Meier](#)

AS many of the African American characters will speak AAVE, I thought I would list the main features and provide some audio samples.

“SIGNATURE SOUNDS”

Most of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols, appearing between square brackets, may be familiar to you from their regular use in dictionaries, but if you want a fuller demonstration, see my Interactive IPA charts demonstration at [this link](#). I also publish two apps, [this one for iOS](#), and [this one for Android](#).

1. [d] for voiced /th/ [ð] in word-initial position, e.g. *these, those* [diz, douz]
2. [v] for voiced /th/ [ð] in word-medial and word-final position, e.g. *brother, soothe* [bɪʌvə, suv]
3. [f] or [t] for /th/ in word final or word-medial positions, e.g. *mouth, south* [maʊf, saʊf]
4. [n] for /ng/ in *singin' hurryin'*, etc.
5. Reduction of consonant clusters like /ft/ (*soft* becomes *sof*); /sks/ (*masks* becomes *mas*); /kt/ (*expect* becomes [ɪkspek]), etc..
6. /str/ as in *strength, strict*, etc., becomes 'shtr' [ʃtɹɛnf, ʃtɹɪk]
7. Treatment of /r/.
 - a. Softened or dropped entirely when following a vowel, e.g. *barn, born, four, brother, letter, hire*
 - i. notice special vowel [əɪ] for *burn, shirt, worm*, etc.. Many speakers, however, use the r-colored vowel [ɜ] of General American
 - ii. notice special vowel for *for* [foʊ], and similar words
 - b. may be dropped in unstressed syllables following another consonant, e.g. *prefer, cremate*, [pəfəɪ, kɪmɛɪt] etc.
 - c. dropped or very softened in some “intervocalic” positions, e.g. *hurry, Paris, marry, here is* [hɹɪ, pɛəs, məɪ, hɪə iəz]
8. PRICE diphthong is “monophthongized” (becomes one-stage vowel) in open syllables or when followed by voiced consonant, e.g. *I, shy, fine, tide, tiger, time*, [ʃa, fan, tad, tagə, tam] etc..
9. short [ʌ] vowel of *money, courage, trust*, etc drawled as [mɜːni, kɜːdʒ, tɪɜːs]
10. short [ɪ] vowel of *mist, kit, live* etc. drawled as [miəs, kiət, liəv]
11. [æ] vowel of *man, laugh, dance* etc., drawled as [mæɪən, læɪəf, dəɪəns]
12. Some other vowels drawled (more in some phonetic contexts than others) e.g. *dress* [dɪɪəs], *thought* [fɒt], *gone* [gaʊn]
13. Treatment of /l/

- a. following vowel it become more vowel-like, e.g. *feel, fill, held, soldier*, [fiʊ, fiʊ, hɛʊd, soʊdʒɐ] etc.
 - b. dropped in some clusters, e.g. *help, only, self* [hɛp, ɒʊnɪ, sɛf]
 - c. preceding a vowel as in *line, length, polite*, etc, the /l/ is somewhat darker (velarized) and has more duration than in GenAm
14. Occasional “Metathesis” of consonants: *ask* as [æks], *lisp* as [lɪps], etc..
15. [ɛ] → [ɪ] when /e/ is followed by /m/ or /n/, e.g. *pen* as [pɪn], *remember* as [ɪəmɪmbɐ]
16. [i] unstressed endings become short [ɪ], e.g. *pretty, Sally, parties* [pɪrɪ, sælɪ, pɑːrɪz]; also *he/she/we/me* when unstressed, as in *he laughed, he went*, [hɪ læɪf, hɪ wɪnt] etc.
17. CHOICE words: diphthong reduced, e.g. *choice, boy, oyster* as [tʃɔs, bɔ, ɔstɐ]
18. Unstressed final –o and –ow syllables reduced, e.g. *window, yellow, pimento, mulatto* [wɪndɐ, jɛlə, pəˈmɪnɐ, mjulætɐ]

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

1. Greater contrast between stressed and unstressed words than in General American, e.g. *I was **walk**ing in the **park** all day **long***
2. Stronger “attack” and “decay” than in GenAm, with volume fading or “decaying” sharply at the ends of words

For a fuller account of AAVE, see [this article](#) by Erik R. Thomas

And for audio samples of early 20th century and southern AAVE, see these links:

<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/alabama-8>

<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/alabama-13>

<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/mississippi-12>

<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/mississippi-13>

<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/texas-17>

23 year-old female, Memphis

<https://dare.wisc.edu/audio/tennessee-black-power/>

Fountain Hughes, (101) born a slave, Virginia, 1848, recorded 1949; and others

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/>

Account of Vernon Dahmer, Mississippi, by his wife and daughter
<https://storycorps.org/podcast/storycorps-491-we-came-through/> (3:13 – 5:33)

Sanitation workers, Elmore Nickleberry and Taylor Rogers, Memphis, TN, (7:00 – 8:41)
<https://pt-br.facebook.com/StoryCorps/videos/10156263803773622/>

Geraldine Nash and Gustina Atlas
<https://storycorps.org/stories/geraldine-nash-and-gustina-atlas/>

Queen Quet from the Gullah, GA, Festival
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToIv79gtzpo>

Trailer, Krueger-Scott African American Oral History collection, telling story of Second Great Migration
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE-2OVXyILk>

Black Movies of 1930s and 40s
Hear how African American actors of that period enacted their own culture
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw1oNDOo806sG9EQ5hEinbrXpkTUHR_y8
<https://www.fesfilms.com/public-domain/black-heritage.html>