



# THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE SUPPLEMENT 2

AN INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF ENGLISH IN THE UNITED STATES

H. L. MENCKEN

A K N O P F  B O O K

BOOKS BY *H • L • MENCKEN*



THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE: Supplement I

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE: Supplement II

HAPPY DAYS

NEWSPAPER DAYS

HEATHEN DAYS

} which, taken together, constitute  
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SUPPLEMENT II

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T H E

*American Language*

AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH  
IN THE UNITED STATES

BY  
H. L. Mencken

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1990  
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## PREFACE

This Supplement follows the plan of Supplement I. In the latter I tried to give some account of the new material relating to the subjects discussed in the first six chapters of "The American Language," fourth edition, 1936. In the present volume I deal with such material as relates to the five chapters following them. I had hoped also to give a little space to the subject of Chapter XII, to wit, the future of American English, and to present some new matter about the non-English languages dealt with in the Appendix. Yet more, I had hoped to take up in a second Appendix certain themes not discussed at all in the fourth edition – for example, the language of gesture, that of children, the names of political parties, cattle brands, animal calls, and so on. But my notes turn out to be so enormous that I have been forced to close the present volume with Chapter XI, lest it grow to an impossible bulk. It is highly improbable that I'll ever attempt a Supplement III, but meanwhile my notes are preserved and indeed still piling up, and I may be tempted from time to time to present some of them in articles for the periodicals devoted to or showing some interest in American speech. At my age a man encounters frequent reminders, some of them disconcerting, that his body is no more than a highly unstable congeries of the compounds of carbon. In order to avoid fretting about this unpleasant fact I have arranged that all my books, pamphlets, journals, newspaper clippings and letters on speech shall go, at my death, to a place where they will be open to other students. Meanwhile, I'll be glad as always to hear from such students, and ask them to address me at 1524 Hollins street, Baltimore-23.

I am not trained in linguistic science, and can thus claim no profundity for my book. It represents the gatherings, not of an expert in linguistics, but simply of a journalist interested in language, and if there appears in it any virtue at all it is the homely virtue of diligence. Someone had to bring together the widely scattered field material and try to get some order and coherence into it, and I fell into the job. My professional friends, I have no doubt, have often had their teeth set on edge by some of my observations and conclusions, but they have nevertheless shown a generous and accommodating spirit, and I owe a great deal to their friendly if somewhat pained interest. Many of them are given specific credit for their aid in my footnotes, and others have been thanked in previous prefaces. But I must recall once again some men and women who have helped me most, including laymen who have greatly augmented my materials. Mention the American language, and you have mentioned Dr. Louise Pound. Read this book, and you will find countless proofs of it. Others upon whom I have leaned heavily are Dr. Joseph M. Carrière, P. E. Cleator, Monsignor J. B. Dudek, Fred Hamann, Alexander Kadison, Charles J. Lovell, Dr. Raven I. McDavid, Jr., Lieut. Col. F.

G. Potts and Dr. Harold Wentworth. But these are only a few: there have been many more. Most of all I am indebted to my secretary, Mrs. Rosalind C. Lohrfinck, whose heroic struggles with a maddening manuscript make her deserve a large part of the credit for the diligence that I have just claimed for myself.

As in my two previous volumes I have been very liberal with references. Experience has taught me that readers of such books as this one like to explore the byways of the subject, and thus do not object to frequent guideposts. Such explorations are greatly facilitated, as my own inquiries have been facilitated, by the incomparably efficient photostat service of the New York Public Library. Find your reference and send in your order, and you will have your photostat within a few days. The library very seldom reports that what is wanted is not on its shelves: its collections, especially in the more picturesque departments of Americana, appear to be unsurpassed on this or any other earth. Moreover, its staff is highly competent, and I have got frequent valuable help from one member in particular, Mr. G. E. Fielstra. I need hardly add my thanks to writers and publishers for permission to quote from their books and magazine articles, for my debt to them is visible on every page. Such a work as this, in fact, is essentially a collaboration, and in the present case it is a collaboration covering a large area. In the field of the speech of homicidal endeavor I have received contributions from generals and admirals, privates and seamen; in that of pedagogy from the presidents of universities and country schoolma'ams, and in that of language in general from high ecclesiastical dignitaries and lifers in prison.

The plan of this volume is exactly like that of Supplement I. It follows the order of "The American Language," fourth edition, and each section is hooked to that work by identical headings. But it is not necessary for the reader to have the fourth edition before him to make his way, nor even to have read it, for the new matter here presented is almost always self-contained, and I have included in brackets, wherever they seem useful, explanatory catch-lines or quotations. The figures at the beginnings of sections all refer to the fourth edition.

Baltimore, 1948

H. L. M.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

To save space some of the books referred to frequently in the text are cited by the following catch-words and abbreviations:

AL1 The American Language, by H. L. Mencken; first edition; New York, 1919.

AL2 The same; second edition; New York, 1921.

AL3 The same; third edition; New York, 1923.

AL4 The same; fourth edition; New York, 1936.

Bardsley A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames With Special American Instances, by Charles Wareing Bardsley; London, 1901.

Barrère Argot and Slang, by A. Barrère; London, 1887.

Bartlett A Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States, by John Russell Bartlett; New York, 1848; second edition; Boston, 1859; third edition; Boston, 1860; fourth edition; Boston, 1877.

Bentley A Dictionary of Spanish Terms in English, by Harold W. Bentley; New York, 1932.

Berrey and Van den Bark The American Thesaurus of Slang, by Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van den Bark; New York, 1942; fifth printing, 1947.

Black The Surnames of Scotland, by George F. Black; New York, 1946.

Bristed The English Language in America; in Cambridge Essays, Contributed by Members of the University; London, 1855.

Burke The Literature of Slang, by W. J. Burke; New York, 1939.

Clapin A New Dictionary of Americanisms, by Sylva Clapin; New York, n.d.

Concise Oxford The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, adapted by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler; third edition, revised by H. W. Fowler and H. G. Le Mesurier; Oxford, 1934.

DAE A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles, edited by W. A. Craigie and James R. Hulbert; four vols.; Chicago, 1938–44.

Dunlison Americanisms, in the *Virginia Literary Museum and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c*, signed Wy and supposed to be by Robley Dunlison; Charlottesville, Va., 1829–30.

Ewen A History of Surnames of the British Isles, by C. L'Estrange Ewen; New York, 1931.

Farmer Americanisms Old and New, by John S. Farmer; London, 1889.

Farmer and Henley Slang and Its Analogues, by John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley; seven vols.; London, 1890–1904.

- Grose A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, by Francis Grose; London, 1785; new edition edited by Eric Partridge; London, 1931.
- Heintze Die deutschen Familiennamen, by Albert Heintze; Halle a. S., 1903.
- Holt American Place Names, by Alfred H. Holt; New York, 1938.
- Horwill A Dictionary of Modern American Usage, by H. W. Horwill; Oxford, 1935.
- Humphreys Glossary appended to The Yankey in England, by David Humphreys; n.p., 1815.
- Jones An English Pronouncing Dictionary, by Daniel Jones; fourth edition, revised and enlarged; London, 1937.
- Kennedy A Bibliography of Writings on the English Language From the Beginning of Printing to the End of 1922, by Arthur G. Kennedy; Cambridge & New Haven, 1927.
- Kenyon and Knott A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English, by John Samuel Kenyon and Thomas Albert Knott; Springfield, Mass., 1944.
- Krapp The English Language in America, by George Philip Krapp; two vols., New York, 1925.
- LA Linguistic Atlas of the United States; Linguistic Atlas of New England, by Hans Kurath, Miles L. Hanley, Bernard Bloch, Guy S. Lowman, Jr., and Marcus L. Hansen; Providence, R. I., 1939.
- Maitland The American Slang Dictionary, by James Maitland; Chicago, 1891.
- Mathews The Beginnings of American English, by M. M. Mathews; Chicago, 1931.
- NED A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, edited by James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, and C. T. Onions; ten vols.; Oxford, 1888–1928.<sup>1</sup>
- NED Supplement A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles; Introduction, Supplement and Bibliography; edited by James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions; Oxford, 1933.
- Partridge A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, by Eric Partridge; second edition; New York, 1938.
- Pickering A Vocabulary or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America, by John Pickering; Boston, 1816.
- Practical Standard Funk & Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary of the English Language, edited by Charles Earl Funk; New York, 1946.
- Schele de Vere Americanisms: The English of the New World, by M. Schele de Vere; New York, 1871; second edition, 1872.
- Sherwood Gazetteer of the State of Georgia, by Adiel Sherwood; third edition; 1837.

- Shorter Oxford The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, prepared by William Little, H. W. Fowler and J. Coulson, and revised and edited by C. T. Onions; two vols.; Oxford, 1933.
- Stewart Names on the Land, by George R. Stewart; New York, 1945.
- Supplement I Supplement I: The American Language, by H. L. Mencken; New York, 1945.
- Thornton An American Glossary, by Richard H. Thornton; two vols.; Philadelphia, 1912. Vol. III published serially in *Dialect Notes*, 1931–39.
- Tucker American English, by Gilbert M. Tucker; New York, 1921.
- Ware Passing English of the Victorian Era, by J. Redding Ware; London, n.d.
- Warfel Noah Webster, Schoolmaster to America, by Harry R. Warfel; New York, 1936.
- Warrack A Scots Dialect Dictionary, by Alexander Warrack; London, 1911.
- Webster 1806 A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language, by Noah Webster; New Haven, 1806.
- Webster 1828 An American Dictionary of the English Language, by Noah Webster; New York, 1828.
- Webster 1852 An American Dictionary of the English Language, by Noah Webster; revised and enlarged by Chauncey A. Goodrich; Springfield, Mass., 1852.
- Webster 1934 Webster's New International Dictionary of The English Language, edited by William Allan Neilson, Thomas A. Knott and Paul W. Carhart; Springfield, Mass., 1934.
- Weekley An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English, by Ernest Weekley; New York, 1921.
- Wentworth American Dialect Dictionary, by Harold Wentworth; New York, 1944.
- Weseen A Dictionary of American Slang, by Maurice H. Weseen; New York, 1934.
- Woulfe Irish Names and Surnames, by Patrick Woulfe; Dublin, 1923.
- Wright The English Dialect Grammar, by Joseph Wright; Oxford, 1905.
- Wyld A History of Modern Colloquial English, by Henry Cecil Wyld; London, 1920.

In some cases the authors whose principal works are listed above are also the authors of other works. All references to the latter are in full.

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<sup>1</sup> This work is often referred to as the OED or OD (Oxford Dictionary), but it seems to me to be preferable to use an abbreviation of its actual title.

**VII**  
**THE PRONUNCIATION OF AMERICAN**

## 1. ITS GENERAL CHARACTERS

The fact that there are differences between the way the average literate American speaks and the way the average literate Englishman speaks has long been noted.<sup>1</sup> Many of these differences, as everyone is aware, have to do with vocabulary, and some are so striking that they inevitably attract attention. Thus the American, when he first hears an Englishman mention *corn*, is apt to assume that he means the Indian maize that goes under that name in this country, and is surprised to learn that he uses it as a generic term for all sorts of edible grain, including wheat, rye and barley. Contrariwise, the Englishman is puzzled and maybe a little upset when he discovers that *bowler*, which to him means what we call a *Derby* hat, means in the United States only a person engaged in bowling, and not any object at all. But these differences, though they still engage the scrutiny of persons who write about the two languages, are not as important as they used to be, for in recent years the English have picked up so many terms from the United States that they understand American more or less even when they do not undertake to speak it; and in any case the subject need not be pursued here, for it has been dealt with at length in Chapter VI of Supplement I and at various other places in the same book.

The differences in pronunciation, however, show a higher degree of resistance to change, despite the ever-growing influence of American talkies, and some of them promise to survive for a long while. They extend to many common words, e.g., *can't*, *deficit*, and *secretary*. The Englishman, using the first of these, gives it a broad *a* that is rare in the United States save in those areas – for example, the Boston region and the swankier suburbs of New York – where emulation of English usage is still potent in speechways; and most Americans, when they seek to imitate him or his imitators in speaking, are careful to throw in plenty of *cawnts*, and some even add a few *cawns*, though he actually pronounces *can* exactly as we do, to rhyme with *pan*. In words of the *deficit* class – other examples are *compensate*, *confiscate* and *demonstrate* – the difference is one of stress rather than of vowel-quality, for the Englishman puts the accent on the second syllable, whereas the American commonly stresses the first. In *secretary* what the Englishman does is to get rid of a syllable altogether, so that the word becomes, to American ears, *secretry*; the American himself almost always gives it its lawful four, and lays a slight but unmistakable second stress on the third, which he rhymes with *care*.

This last difference is typical of many others, for American speech, on the whole, follows the spelling more faithfully than English speech, and is thus clearer and more precise. A musician might describe the divergence by saying that the latter tends toward *glissando*, whereas the former is predominantly *staccato* and *marcato*. Why this should be so is not known with any assurance, though a great many persons have put forth confident theories, some of which have to do with alleged differences in the vocal apparatus of Americans and

Englishmen, produced by differences in climate. But there is really no evidence that climate has any such effects. Even the adenoidal nasalization that Englishmen so often complain of in American speech, putting the blame for it on the comparative dryness of the American air, is really not peculiar to this country, for it is encountered also in the speech of the London cockneys, and is characteristic of the speech of all Frenchmen. Moreover, the mean annual rainfall in New York, Chicago and St. Louis is actually higher than it is in London, Liverpool or Edinburgh, and in the American South, where the American whine is seldom heard, it is higher still – in New Orleans, more than twice as high.<sup>1</sup>

My own guess, disregarding this nonsense about adenoids, is that Americans, taking one with another, speak more distinctly than Englishmen largely because their speechways were molded, for four generations, by Noah Webster's famous Spelling Book. From 1783, when it was first published, until the beginning of the Twentieth Century, when the wizards of Teachers College, Columbia, began supplanting it with spellers of their own, it was the most widely circulated book in the country,<sup>1</sup> and the most influential. Indeed, it was the only work on language that the average American ever saw, or even heard of. It had no traffic with slurring, but insisted that all words be pronounced as Jahveh had spelled them out to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, or to the sons of Noah after the Flood.<sup>2</sup> Webster gave *secretary* four syllables, and noted that there was what he called "a half accent" on the third;<sup>3</sup> he insisted upon full *r*'s in such words as *far*, *fire* and *fore*, *hard*, *heart* and *cargo*; he frowned upon pronouncing *actual* as *actshual*, *aperture* as *apertshure* and *bounteous* as *bountcheous*, and he even insisted upon spelling pronunciations in such proper names as *Norfolk*, *Thames* and *Greenwich*.<sup>4</sup>

But though he was thus very influential in fixing the national standards of pronunciation in rather rigid molds, he was only giving voice and momentum to what was really a spontaneous natural tendency. The Americans, taking one with another, were a highly matter of fact people, and could see nothing save folly in the affected pronunciations that became fashionable in England during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century. Those pronunciations arose in the court circles of London, were adopted by the more pretentious sort of actors, and were propagated and given standing by the pronouncing dictionaries of Thomas Sheridan (1780) and John Walker (1791), both of whom had been actors and teachers of elocution before they put on the shroud of the lexicographer.<sup>1</sup> But in the United States such dubious authorities were combatted earnestly and even with some violence (despite a few concessions) by the peppery Webster, and in consequence they were impeded in making converts for their stretched vowels and macerated consonants. American speechways went back to an earlier and less self-conscious era,<sup>2</sup> and remained more logical and rational. If the people of the young Republic were influenced at all by relatively recent English precept and example it was by the movement toward spelling-pronunciations which antedated by half a century the rage for actorial affectations. Their speech

was thus marked by clarity,<sup>1</sup> and not only by clarity but also by a high degree of uniformity, so that nearly all the English travelers who ventured into the country after the Revolution were struck by the comparative absence of class and regional dialects. These Englishmen, accustomed to being beset by what they regarded as gross barbarisms the moment they got out of the ambits of the court, the theatres and the two universities at home, were astonished to discover that nearly all Americans talked alike, on the lower as well as the higher levels of society, and that their talk was generally clear and hence easily understood. There were, of course, some differences, and Webster himself often gave evidence that he was a New Englander and not a Southerner, but such differences were not numerous and none were important. Save, in fact, for a few oddities in vocabulary, it was perfectly possible to understand any man encountered along the road, even in the Far South or beyond the Alleghanies, and there was nothing anywhere that could be reasonably compared to the gnarled and difficult local dialects of Somerset, Lancashire and Yorkshire, to say nothing of Scotland and Wales, or of proletarian London.<sup>2</sup>

Allen Walker Read has devoted two of his valuable studies in the history of American English to the observations of these travelers and of other Eighteenth Century Englishmen.<sup>3</sup> The first to discourse upon the subject was probably Hugh Jones, a clerical pedagogue who spent the years from 1716 to 1721 at William and Mary College in Virginia, and while there wrote "An Accidence of the English Tongue" that was the first grammar-book ever begotten on American soil. In another work, "The Present State of Virginia," he testified that "the planters and even the native Negroes generally talk good English, without idiom or tone."<sup>1</sup> This was confirmed forty years later by a Scotsman of noble birth, Lord Adam Gordon, who made a progress through the colonies in 1764 and 1765. In Philadelphia, he said, "the propriety of language surprised me much, the English tongue being spoken by all ranks in a degree of purity and perfection surpassing any but the polite part of London." Five years afterward came William Eddis, who wrote home on June 8, 1770:

In England almost every county is distinguished by a peculiar dialect,... but in Maryland and throughout the adjacent provinces ... a striking similarity of speech universally prevails, and it is strictly true that the pronunciation of the generality of the people has an accuracy and elegance that cannot fail of gratifying the most judicious ear.

The colonists are composed of adventurers not only from every district of Great Britain and Ireland, but from almost every other European government. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the English language must be greatly corrupted by such a strange intermixture of various nations? The reverse is, however, true. The language of the immediate descendants of such a promiscuous ancestry is perfectly uniform and unadulterated, nor has it borrowed any provincial or national accent from its British or foreign parentage....

This uniformity ... prevails not only on the coast, where Europeans form a considerable mass of the people, but likewise in the interior parts, where population has made but slow advances, and

where opportunities seldom occur to derive any great advantages from an intercourse with intelligent strangers.

Such testimonies continued until near the end of the century, when the London reviews launched that ill-humored war upon American speechways which has gone on ever since, with prudent truces every time a pressing need for Yankee bayonets has made it impolitic to be too critical of Yankee talk.<sup>2</sup> Even the unhappy success of the Revolution, though it left some bitterness, did not provoke the attack, for the English, during the decade following Yorktown, seem to have entertained some hope that the wayward colonies might return, and, in any case, regarded them disdainfully in the rôle of political and commercial rivals. Indeed, there were Englishmen who spoke favorably of American speech while the struggle was actually going on, and one of them was the otherwise bitterly anti-American Jonathan Boucher,<sup>1</sup> who wrote on December 23, 1777 that “in North America there prevails not only, I believe, the purest pronunciation of the English tongue that is anywhere to be met with, but a perfect uniformity.” On July 19 of the same year one Nicholas Cresswell, who came out in 1774 and remained three years, wrote that “though the inhabitants of this country are composed of different nations and different languages, yet it is very remarkable that they in general speak better English than the English do.” “No country or colonial dialect is to be distinguished here,” he went on, “except it be the New Englanders, who have a sort of whining cadence that I cannot describe.” So late as 1791 the editor of an English reprint of Dr. David Ramsay’s “History of the American Revolution” was moved to say in his preface:

It is a curious fact that there is perhaps no one portion of the British empire in which two or three millions of persons are to be found who speak their mother tongue with greater purity or a truer pronunciation than the white inhabitants of the United States. This was attributed, by a penetrating observer, to the number of British subjects assembled in America from various quarters, who, in consequence of their intercourse and intermarriages, soon dropped the peculiarities of their several provincial idioms, retaining only what was fundamental and common to them all – a process which the frequency or rather the universality of school-learning in America must naturally have assisted.<sup>2</sup>

This Englishman’s surmise as to the cause of the uniformity of speech visible in the United States is supported by the fact that immigration from one State or another has been active since the earliest days. The case of Ramsay, noted below, was not unusual even before the Revolution, and today it is a commonplace of observation that the population of the big cities is made up largely of native Americans born elsewhere, and to a considerable extent in distant States.<sup>1</sup> But the early levelling of dialects was more than a mere amalgamation, for the resultant general speech of the country was influenced much more by several of the British dialects than by all the rest. Which of these dialects had the greatest weight has been discussed at length without any unanimous agreement, but the preponderance of opinion seems to be that American English, at least in the North, got most of its characters from the

speech of the southeastern counties of England. “While every one of the forty counties,” said John Fiske in “The Beginnings of New England,”<sup>2</sup> “was represented in the great Puritan exodus, the East Anglican counties contributed to it far more than all the rest. Perhaps it would not be far out of the way to say that two-thirds of the American people who can trace their ancestry to New England might follow it back to the East Anglican shires of the mother-country; one-sixth might follow it to those southwestern counties – Devonshire, Dorset and Somerset – which so long were foremost in maritime enterprise; one-sixth to other parts of England.” This is confirmed by Anders Orbeck, whose study of the Seventeenth Century town records of Massachusetts<sup>3</sup> leads him to conclude that if “Essex, Middlesex, and London, as well as Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire” are included in the East Anglican counties, slightly over 71% of the pioneers of Plymouth, Watertown and Dedham who can be traced came from that area. Further confirmation is provided by Read, who has shown that the Americans of the early Eighteenth Century were quick to notice peculiarities in the speech of recent immigrants from the British Isles, but saw nothing to remark in that of those who came from east of Wiltshire or south of the Wash.<sup>1</sup>

Orbeck, in the monograph just mentioned, rehearses the contrary speculations of some of the earlier writers on the subject. In 1885 Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts, then president of the American Antiquarian Society, read at its annual meeting a paper in which he not only sought to show that the speech of New England was based upon that of Kent, but also argued that the same county, which he described as “the England of England,” was the source of many other salient traits of the New England culture.<sup>2</sup> Hoar cited many familiar New England terms in support of his contention, *e.g.*, *slick* for *sleek*, *be* for *am*, *grub* (food), *to argufy*, *bid* (a chicken), *to bolt* (food), and *brand-new*, but he ran these terms no further back than William Holloway’s “General Dictionary of Provincialisms” of 1839, and his own evidence showed that many of them were also to be found in Sussex. A year later, before the same audience, his conclusions were challenged by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who used the second edition of Francis Grose’s “Provincial Glossary,” 1790, and the supplement thereto, published as an appendix to the second edition of Samuel Pegge’s “Anecdotes of the English Language,” 1814.<sup>3</sup> Higginson rejected all of Hoar’s evidence, and argued that American English showed very strong North Country influences. Of the terms that he investigated, he said, 109 came from that region, and only 18 from southeastern England. “The proportion of North Country words,” he concluded, “is absolutely overwhelming,” and many of them were also to be found in “the Lowland Scots of Scott and Burns.”<sup>1</sup>

Years later a Scottish specialist in mythology, Lewis Spence, convinced himself that “the English spoken in the United States is to a great extent merely the popular Midland English of the Seventeenth Century brought more or less up to date by constant communication with the parent country, yet

retaining more of the vocalization of the older form by reason of a certain degree of isolation.” Spence admitted that he also found traces of influence from Norfolk and even from Cornwall, but insisted that the Midlands were the chief source, and professed to find evidences of Danish coloring, stretching back to the Ninth Century.<sup>2</sup> But the preponderance of opinion among writers on the subject has always inclined toward the East Anglican theory of American speech origins, which is supported more or less by many familiar New England place-names, *e.g.*, *Yarmouth*, *Ipswich*, *Haverhill* and the nearby (in England) *Cambridge* and *Boston*. A good example is offered by Schele de Vere. In his “Americanisms: the English of the New World,” he declared flatly that the early New England immigrants brought from Norfolk and Suffolk “not only their words, which the Yankee still uses, but also a sound of the voice and a mode of utterance which have been faithfully preserved, and are now spoken of as the ‘New England drawl’ and ‘the high, metallic ring of the New England voice.’ ”<sup>3</sup> In another place, in speaking of Southern American speech, he said that its disregard for the letter *r* should be laid upon “the shoulders of the guilty forefathers, many of whom came from Suffolk and the districts belonging to the East Anglians.”<sup>4</sup>

Hans Kurath, editor of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, agrees with this in so far as the coastal South is concerned. “Like the seaboard of New England,” he says, “the Tidewater region of Virginia received most of its early population from Southeastern England.”<sup>1</sup> But he holds that the speech of the areas back from the seacoast shows the influence of “Scotch-Irish who spoke ... the English of the Lowlands of Scotland or the North of England as modified by the Southern English standard.” This, however, is not borne out by an investigation undertaken by Cleanth Brooks, Jr., who shows in “The Relation of the Alabama-Georgia Dialect to the Provincial Dialects of Great Britain”<sup>2</sup> that relatively few of the vowel and consonant forms now to be found in the area examined are also encountered in the Scottish and northern English dialects, but that 93% of the former and 95% of the latter are highly characteristic of southwestern (not southeastern) England. Though, says Brooks,

the agreement between the southwest dialects and the Alabama-Georgia dialect in a few particulars might be explained as accidental, their agreement in many – indeed, in nearly every instance in which the Alabama-Georgia dialect differs from standard English – makes any explanation on the basis of a merely accidental relationship untenable.... This is not to say for a moment, of course, that the Alabama-Georgia dialect is the dialect of Somerset or Devon, but the fact that the former, wherever it deviates from standard English, *deviates with the latter*, indicates that it has been strongly colored by it.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on:

Whereas historical corroboration is lacking, there is nothing in the theory of southwest country influence which runs counter to the known facts. The southwest counties are coast counties and were from Elizabethan times active in exploration and colonization. Of the two companies founded

in 1606 for the settlement of Virginia, one was composed of men from Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth.

The area studied by Brooks is a relatively small one, but I think it may be taken as typical of the whole lowland South,<sup>4</sup> saving only Tidewater and the bayou region of Louisiana. He follows Krapp<sup>1</sup> in holding that in this area “the speech of the Negro and of the white is essentially the same” and that what are commonly regarded as “specifically Negro forms” are only “older English forms which the Negro must have taken originally from the white man, and which he has retained after the white man has begun to lose them.”<sup>2</sup> To this another highly competent Southern observer, W. Cabell Greet, agrees. “As the Negro,” he says, “has preserved the Methodist and Baptist camp-meeting hymns of a century ago in his spirituals, English dances in his clogs and jigs and reels, so he has kept old ways of speech.”<sup>3</sup> Tidewater Southern differs in many ways from this bi-racial lingo but Greet shows that it is confined to a relatively limited area, radiating from the lowlands to such inland islands as Richmond, Charlottesville and the northern Shenandoah valley, but hardly extending beyond. The rest of the South, until one comes to the mountains, the French areas of Louisiana and the cattle country to the westward, follows the patterns described by Brooks. Tidewater Southern, like the dialect of the narrow Boston area and that of the lower Hudson valley, appears to have been considerably influenced by the fashionable London English of the Eighteenth Century. The reason is obvious. These regions, from the earliest days, maintained a closer contact with England than the other parts of the country, and their accumulation of wealth filled them with social aspiration and made them especially responsive to upper-class example. The Civil War shifted the money of the South from Tidewater to the Piedmont, but the conservative lowland gentry continued faithful to the speechways acquired in their days of glory, and the plain people followed them. But all the more recent intrusions of English ways of speech have entered in the Boston and New York areas and on the level of conscious Anglomania.<sup>4</sup>

There remains the speech of the overwhelming majority of Americans – according to some authorities, at least 95,000,000 of the 140,000,000 inhabitants of the continental United States. It is called Northern American by John S. Kenyon and Thomas A. Knott,<sup>1</sup> Western or General American by George Philip Krapp,<sup>2</sup> Middle Western by many lay writers,<sup>3</sup> and American Standard by George L. Trager,<sup>4</sup> and is described by the last named as “the pronunciation ... of the whole country except the old South, New England and the immediate vicinity of New York city.” More, it is constantly spreading, and two of its salient traits, the flat *a* and the clearly sounded *r*, are making heavy inroads in the territories once faithful to the broad *a* and the silent *r*. “Only in the immediate neighborhood of Boston and in the greater part of New Hampshire and Maine,” says Bernard Bloch,<sup>5</sup> “is the so-called Eastern pronunciation universal,” and even in this region there are speech-islands in which it is challenged. New England west of the Connecticut river now belongs predominantly to the domain of General American, and so does all of New York State save the suburbs of New York, and all the rest of the country

save the late Confederate States. Even the dialect of Appalachia, though it differs from General American, differs from it less than it differs from any regional variety.

What, then, was the origin of this widespread and now thoroughly typical form of speech, and why is it prevailing against all other forms? There are authorities who seek to answer, as in the case of New England, by pointing to population statistics. “The Piedmont of Virginia and the Carolinas, and the Great Valley,” says Kurath in the paper lately quoted, “were largely settled, during the half-century preceding the Revolution, by the Scotch-Irish, who spoke ... the English of the Lowlands of Scotland or the north of England as modified by the Southern English Standard. They neither dropped their *r*’s nor did they pronounce their long mid-vowels diphthongal fashion. The large German element from Pennsylvania ultimately acquired this type of English.” Moreover, it also found lodgment in Western New England, which received a considerable admixture of Scotch-Irish during the same period, and the speechways of this region soon “became established in New York State and in the Western Reserve of Ohio,” and thence moved into the whole of the opening West. Unquestionably this influence of Scotch-Irish example was powerful all along the frontier, and even nearer the coast it must have had some effect, for many of the early schoolmasters were Scotsmen or Irishmen. Though some eminent phonologists dissent, and I am mindful of Dr. Louise Pound’s tart but just remark that “it is the amateur in phonetic matters who speaks with strongest conviction and feels surest of his message,”<sup>1</sup> I find it impossible to put away the suspicion that later tides of pedagogy considerably reinforced the movement away from the southeastern English speechways of the Atlantic seaboard and toward those of the Scotch lowlands and the English North. The original Scottish schoolmasters, to be sure, did not long outlast the Eighteenth Century, nor did the Irishmen who followed them. By the time the great movement into the West was well under way both were beginning to be displaced by native young men,<sup>1</sup> and before the Civil War these native young men were giving way in their turn to females. Not many of the latter, in their primeval form, had any education beyond that of the common schools they taught in; the great majority, indeed, were simply milkmaids armed with hickory sticks. They could thus muster up no authority of their own, but had to depend perforce upon that of the books in their hands – and the book that was there invariably, before and above all others, was the aforesaid blue Speller of Noah Webster, When it got any support at all, it was usually from his unfolding series of dictionaries.

Webster was a New Englander, but he was not a Bostonian, and his central purpose, as he wrote to John Pickering, was “to deliver ... my countrymen from the errors that fashion and ignorance” were seeking to introduce from England<sup>2</sup> – and succeeding more or less in the Boston and New York areas. He advocated, above all, clarity and consistency in utterance,<sup>3</sup> and was against all the vowel changes, sacrifice of consonants and other perversions that were imitated from contemporary England usage in the Anglomaniacal circles of