

Yorkville Crossing: White teens, hip hop and African American English¹

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ABSTRACT

This case study focuses on a white upper middle class New York City teenager who employed linguistic features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). It describes some of these features, discusses their origins, and explores the complex dynamics of identification with hip hop, a youth subculture involving the consumption of rap music, baggy clothes and participation in activities like break dancing, writing graffiti and rapping.

KEYWORDS: Language crossing, African American Vernacular English, hip-hop, youth culture, commodification

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper returns to some of the issues raised in Hatala's (1976) study of Carla, a 13 year-old white girl who was thought to speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE). When Labov reassessed Hatala's work, he argued that Carla was not an authentic speaker of AAVE because she had only acquired a subset of phonological and prosodic features (Labov 1980). In my paper, I look at the speech of 'Mike', a white 16 year-old boy who, like Carla, demonstrates the use of many AAVE phonological and lexical features but lacks the tense and aspect system. There were, though, some important social differences between Mike and Carla. Carla grew up in an overwhelmingly African American neighborhood and school environment in Camden, New Jersey, whereas Mike was living on Park Avenue in a neighborhood known as 'Yorkville' (one of the wealthiest in New York City) and attended an exclusive private high school. Carla's friends were mainly African American whereas most of Mike's friends were white. Carla's adoption of AAVE features may have reflected an effort to adapt to her environment, but Mike's linguistic behavior begs another explanation.

According to Tricia Rose, whites are 'fascinated by [black culture's] differences, drawn in by mainstream social constructions [of black culture] . . . as a forbidden narrative, [and] a symbol of rebellion' (1994a: 5). In this

line of interpretation, the adoption of African American speech markers is an attempt by young middle class whites like Mike to take part in the complex prestige of African American youth culture, and in the following pages, I shall elaborate on this, referring to Mike's case in order to discuss the role of hip-hop culture in young whites' motivations to use AAVE features in their speech.

2. THE INFORMANT: MIKE

Mike is the son of a close friend of mine and I have watched him grow up since he was six years old. I have been observing his language practices since 1993 when he was about 13, and I began collecting data in late 1995 when he was 15. At around age 13, he began to identify quite strongly with hip-hop culture.² He wore baggy jeans, a reverse baseball cap, designer sneakers, and developed a taste for rap music – a 'wigga' or 'white nigga' according to Smitherman's definition (1994: 168). He became part of a growing cohort of white, well-to-do teenagers referred to as 'prep school gangsters' in the popular press (Sales 1996). At around the same time he began to change the way he spoke, 'crossing' into AAVE (Rampton 1995). His everyday linguistic repertoire was strongly influenced by AAVE³ phonology, prosody and hip-hop slang, and this was commented on negatively by family members who said he 'sounded like a street kid or hoodlum.' One incident in particular marks an early attempt at imitating AAVE. During a phone call with his best friend, Mike demonstrated a quick conversational repair to a typical AAVE form:

1. Mike (age 13): I gotta ask, I mean **aks** [æks] my mom.

In Britain, Hewitt (1986) showed that some white adolescents in primarily white neighborhoods pass through a phase 'in which they display their cultural allegiance with blacks' (1986: 159). When Mike was 13–14 years old, this manifested itself in vocal criticism of groups he viewed as anti-African American (including Jews and Koreans), and he accused his mother of racism when she affectionately referred to one of his African American childhood friends as 'el negrito' (his mother is from Spain). He tried to hide the fact that he lived in an expensive neighborhood in Manhattan by giving out his older brother's Brooklyn phone number to friends and acquaintances, and in fact, this is somewhat in line with research done on hip-hop chat lines on the internet, where it is common for fans (who are primarily middle class) to try to prove their authenticity in hip-hop by claiming a connection with poverty (Rebensdorf 1996).

Mike's self-alignment with hip-hop drew on stereotyped conceptions of gangs and African American urban street culture. Discussing formative sociolinguistic studies of AAVE, Morgan criticizes their simplistic depiction of vernacular or core black culture and language as 'male, adolescent,

insular, and trifling' (1994: 328), and indeed a comparable reductionism seems to be at work in the way that many white male teens interpret hip-hop culture. Mike's claims of authenticity took the form of activities he and others associated with urban black and Latino youth: he adopted a 'tag' name which he scrawled on the walls of banks and expensive apartment buildings near his house, he began experimenting with drugs, he joined a gang, and he had frequent run-ins with the police. At the end of his first year of high school (when he was 14), a 'friend' (in his words) pushed him through a glass door, cutting through several tendons and a nerve in each wrist. Following surgery and several weeks of recovery, he went out to Central Park against the doctor's orders where some rival gang members – most of them also white – held him down and broke his arms with baseball bats. His mother hoped that these experiences would scare him into changing his behavior but this was not played out immediately. Mike continued to see the same friends and was asked not to return to the private school he had been attending since kindergarten.

The following year, when he was 15, Mike began attending another private school. He seemed happier, got passing grades and began thinking about college. He was now more likely to modify his speech in the direction of standard English forms in the presence of authority figures, but he continued to use AAVE phonology, hip-hop terms and tags such as 'yo' and 'know what I'm sayin' as part of his every speech style (and still does now at age 19). Mike is presently in his second year at a conservative private college. He has shed the gangster/ghetto image he projected in his early teens in favor of a more clean cut, 'preppie' look, yet he continues to get involved in violent confrontations. In fact, he is struggling to get out of academic and disciplinary probation at the same time as fighting a multi-million dollar legal case resulting from an altercation he had with a bouncer at a restaurant. Mike's life has of course been influenced by much more than his hip hop affiliations, and among other things, he has had to deal, like a lot of his peers, with the divorce of his parents. Even so, in spite of its origins in mainstream misrepresentations and its waning as he got older, his hip hop self-portrayal has been much more consequential for him than notions like 'adolescent phase' and 'stylistic flirtation' might at first imply.

3. MIKE'S SPEECH

My long-standing relationship with Mike as a family friend allowed for longitudinal observations over more than 5 years, but for the main part of my account of his language, I will draw on individual interviews, group sessions and participant observation when Mike was 15–16 years old. In 1995–6, I began recording some one-on-one interviews with him. Later on, I was able to tape some group sessions with several of his friends, all of whom were also white (as indeed am I). On his suggestion, I also loaned him a tape recorder so he

could record some sessions with his friends, and these sessions are characterized by some self-conscious addressing of the microphone interspersed with animated, interactions between Mike and his friends against a backdrop of 'hip-hop' and 'techno' music. In all, I base my account on approximately six hours of recorded material plus the observations I have made from 1992–1998.

Labov (1972, 1980), Labov and Harris (1983), and Ash and Myhill (1986) have all commented on the relative ease with which outsiders can acquire superficial phonological and lexical features of another dialect as opposed to the grammar, and in line with this, most of the AAVE-like elements in Mike's speech were indeed phonological.

In terms of grammar, there were a few cases of copula deletion but it would be hard to make any claims about Mike's command of this feature, partly because there were so few tokens, but also because it occurred in what was an idiomatic expression which many non-African American teens had incorporated into their vocabularies:

2. Mike (age 16; 1996): What up? What up?

He also occasionally used *is* with non-singular third person subjects (compare Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 157):

3. Mike (age 16; 1996): These niggas is got shoes on.

But he didn't display features of the AAVE grammatical system such as third singular -s absence, habitual *be*, or systematic copula deletion.

His orientation to AAVE was much more evident in his segmental phonology, and was displayed in, for example, schwa pronunciation of *the* preceding a vowel, pre-vocalic r-lessness, and stop pronunciation of inter-dental fricatives. I analyzed these in random samples of his speech, counting tokens of each variable for the duration of one side of tape (approximately 15 minutes for each). Whereas in standard American English *the* is pronounced [ðə] if a consonant follows and [ði] if a vowel follows, many AAVE speakers use the schwa pronunciation everywhere (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 146). Mike used the schwa pronunciation in 70 percent (n=10) post-vocalic instances in one sample as compared to 30 percent among the whites studied by Ash and Myhill (1986). Extract 4 is an example of this:

4. Mike: Dass the othah side that fucks it up.
[dæs də 'ʌðə sa:d dæt fʌks ɪr'ʌp]

With regard to R-lessness, Labov showed that black speakers differed from whites with respect to linking /r/: even white r-less New Yorkers pronounce an (r) when followed by a vowel as in *four o'clock*, but for many in the AA speech community, '(r) becomes a glide or disappears in this position' (1972: 13). Mike wasn't r-less before the age of 13 and neither were any of his family, but at age 16, 61 percent (n=18) of r-tokens when followed by a vowel at a word boundary were r-0. Mike's r-lessness in this latter environment comes closer

to Labov's Black Working Class speakers who average 60–80 percent (r=0) than to white New York City vernacular speakers at only 5–10 percent in the same environment (Labov 1972: 39). Extract 5 illustrates this feature:

5. Mike: Yo, she still looks her age.
[jo ʃi stɪl lʊks hə eɪdʒ]

Lastly, in relation to TH-stopping, Mike's stop pronunciation of voiced dental fricatives in word initial position (in articles and demonstratives such as *the*, *this*, *those*) reached 36 percent (n=22), while approximately 50 percent (n=12) of the word final voiceless dental fricatives in the word *with* were voiceless stops. There is little conclusive data in the literature on this feature. Labov 1966 reports levels of voiced TH-stopping in casual speech among upper middle class New York City whites (ages 20–39) of 5 percent (1966: 365). The only tabulated data he gives on African Americans in New York City comes from out-of-town speakers who average about 44 percent voiced TH-stopping (Labov 1966: 645). Extract 6 below is an example from Mike's speech:

6. Mike: nuh . . . yeah, but I had to verify DUH SHIT WIT YOU.
[nʌ jə bʌr ət hæd tə 'verɪfa: dʌ ʃɪ? wɪt tʃu]

Figure 1 below gives an impression of these patterns, comparing Mike's use of these three variables with the findings of Ash and Myhill (1986) on schwa pronunciations of *the* before a vowel, with Labov (1972) on pre-vocalic r-lessness at a word boundary and Labov (1966) on voiced TH-stopping. As we can see, Mike's speech follows that of African Americans more closely than northern whites across these particular variables.

Grammar and segmental phonology do not, of course, provide the only – or even the strongest – indication that Mike was orienting to AAVE in his speech. He also employed prosodic features such as vowel lengthening, syllable contraction and expansion, and stress and rhythm which approximated AAVE. Measuring and quantifying such features is difficult, since as Baugh (1983) points out, they are common to most English dialects. Generally speaking however, informal AAVE shows a tendency to contract the initial syllable and expand the second syllable in polysyllabic words (Baugh 1983: 61). The second syllable variably undergoes vowel lengthening and/or receives greater stress than it would in more formal conversation. Examples of this from Mike's speech are his pronunciation of *suppose* as [spo:z], *fifteen* as [fɪf 'ti::n], and *confusion* [kɔ̃'fju::ʒn].

Lastly, an alignment with AAVE showed up in the lexis he used. Some of the most common lexical items and expressions from mid-1990s hip-hop culture are reported by an internet hip-hop dictionary.⁴ In examples 7–9 below we see a few of the items Mike used with regularity (in bold face type):

7. Mike (age 16; 1996): You ever hear of Frank Frazetta? Dis is some **phat** shit, yo.
Yo, when the dude dies, dis book will probably be worth like
a thousand dollars. Yo, tell me **that shit** is not **phat**!

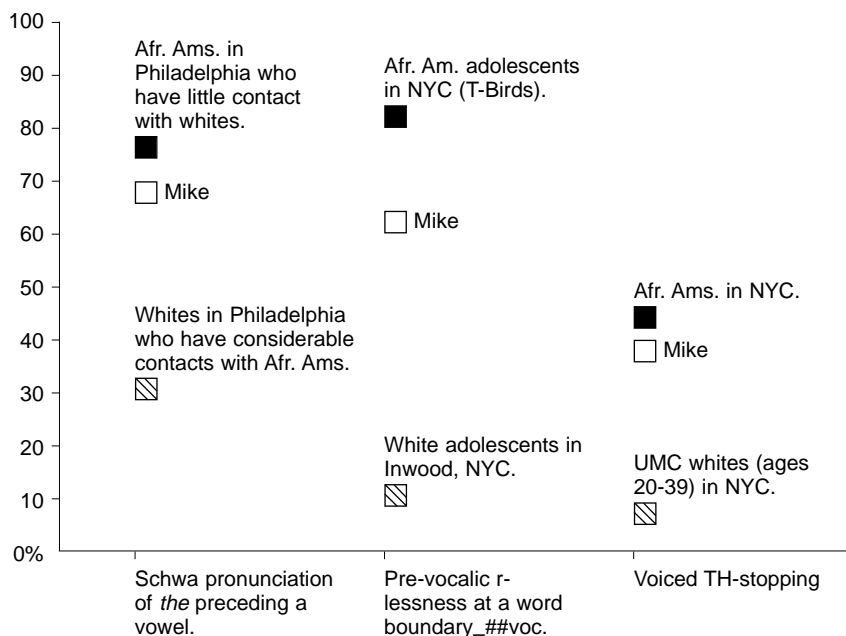


Figure 1: Three phonological variables in Mike's speech are compared to those of African Americans and whites. The data on schwa pronunciation of *the* comes from Ash and Myhill (1986: 39). The data on /r/ is from Labov (1972: 39), and on TH stopping from Labov (1966: 365, 645).

8. Mike (age 15; 1995): Yo, he better know some **bomb bitches** down there!
9. Mike (age 16; 1996): Dis is gonna sound **mad** weird, **yo**. Don't worry, don't worry. I'll put **THE SHIT OFF!** Don't touch it. **Chill**, DON'T TOUCH IT! DON'T TOUCH IT! I got this over here!

4. SOURCES OF ACCESS TO AAVE

For urban white youth, living in a city like New York provides regular opportunities to observe first hand a variety of linguistic forms in subways, on street corners, in parks, night clubs etc. As a teenager, Mike spent a great deal of time outside, 'hanging out' on the street with his friends where he came into contact with kids from Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. Some of his regular social activities, 'tagging' (scrawling graffiti), playing pool, drinking beer on the street with friends and going out to clubs on the weekends brought him into contact and sometimes conflict with kids from other neighborhoods and other ethnic or social groups. He also had a particular white friend he had known since childhood who was something of a linguistic role model. This

friend lived in a poor area and was in a much better position than Mike to acquire AAVE directly. Hewitt (1986) points out the 'Janus-like' role of such whites whose contacts with black culture make them a beacon for its promotion 'amongst white youth' (1986: 144). In this way words and expressions spread to white adolescents who have little direct contact with black people.

But beyond more and less direct face-to-face encounters, access to AAVE is also electronically mediated. As already mentioned, the internet is one increasingly important source for hip-hop terms and expressions, and young people can turn to a host of on-line dictionaries and chat lines to improve their hip-hop repertoires.⁵ For Mike and many others, though, popular music was particularly important. Ever since 'Yo! MTV Raps' went on the air in 1989, sales figures for rap music among middle class white teenagers have sky-rocketed (Rose 1994a). 'Rap music videos have animated hip-hop cultural style and aesthetics and have facilitated cross-neighborhood, cross-country (transnational?) dialogue in a social environment that is highly segregated by class and race' (Rose 1994a: 9). Rap fans can consult lyric sheets in CD cases allowing them to learn the latest expressions coming out of New York City and Los Angeles, and to quite an extent, the words and expressions from these have become incorporated in the speech of teenagers across the entire country. At age 16 Mike's favorite groups included Ice-T, LL Cool J, Two Live Crew, Public Enemy, Snoop Doggie Dog among others, and I often overheard him quoting lyrics to himself from his CD collection. Since then he has gotten interested in 'techno' music which grew out of the DJ dance-hall scene and which also has a lot of cross-over appeal for rap fans.

Thirdly, films on black inner-city life have played a role in the transmission of AAVE to whites. Mike saw all the so-called 'Hood Films' – several times in some cases – which emerged in the early 90s including 'Straight out of Brooklyn' (1991), 'Boyz'n the Hood' (1991), 'Hangin' with the Homeboys' (1991), 'House Party' (1990), 'Menace to Society' (1993), and 'New Jack City' (1991). He also claimed to have seen Spike Lee's 'Do the Right Thing' (1989) at least three or four times. These films have served to transmit views of inner-city ghetto life, in some cases a glamorized version, from which white teenagers can selectively choose to construct their stereotypes about African Americans and hip-hop culture.

5. MIKE, AAVE, AND THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTIFICATION

At certain points in the account above, I may have seemed equivocal as to whether AAVE was associated with urban African American, Latino or indeed white youth. This ambiguity is in fact part of hip-hop itself, and in this section I shall trace the shifts in Mike's alignment across such groupings.

Mike's early experimentation with AAVE at age 13–14 reflected an active identification with African Americans. But after changing schools at age 15 he began expressing resentment toward his African American peers, complaining

that they 'always hang together' and 'separate themselves', and by 16 he seemed to see himself in opposition to the black community. He continued, however to use AAVE phonology and lexicon, but this was no longer an attempt to construct a black identity. Instead, it laid claim to participation in hip-hop as the dominant consumption-based youth culture.

Hip-hop is increasingly claimed to be a multi-cultural lifestyle rather than a symbol of ethnic group identity, particularly by white adolescents but also by others. As such, it seems to allow whites access to a commodified, ephemeral black experience at various moments or phases of their lives without requiring overt claims of black ethnicity, and the sociolinguistic meaning of AAVE appears to be adjusted in the process.

Labov argued that 'if a certain group of speakers uses a particular variant then the social values attributed to that group will be transferred to that linguistic variant' (1972: 25), and Hewitt (1986) suggests that the history of black oppression has led to lower class forms of black language being associated with toughness and survival:

The economic conditions in which black people have been historically placed in post-slavery societies, and particularly in urban contexts, have contributed to the emergence of a strand of – usually male – survival strategies and ideologies, traceable in many urban black cultures, encompassing a combination of toughness and quick wits potentially employed in the service of individual survival. The association of this street code with lower-class life and language has led to the establishment of the lower-class forms of black language as a resource for suggesting those very qualities and the "role" associated with them . . . the use of creole has exactly this reference for many young blacks, who associate the language with a distinctly oppositional street culture. It is for these reasons that, amongst some white adolescents, creole has come to be employed in a range of real and playful competitive situations. (Hewitt 1986: 137; for parallels in the U.S., cf. e.g. Kochman 1972, Folb 1980)

For some white teenage boys and girls, the adoption of black speech forms may indeed be a survival strategy (cf. Carla perhaps), and Mike certainly had some harrowing encounters with gang culture. But for Mike, this was largely by choice rather than necessity. His white middle class background provided no routine contact with gang culture, and instead he had to seek it out, inspired no doubt by the proliferation of 'gangsta rap' during the early 1990s – a genre which glamorized inner city life for many young people (Rebensdorf 1996). Broadly speaking, Mike's orientation to AAVE and hip-hop looked increasingly like a commodified life-style choice, and in the process, the political histories behind AAVE's connotations of urban toughness faded from view. Many young whites feel they have the right to appropriate the hip-hop look and language, and that black adolescents who oppose them are racists. As one presumably white youth wrote in to the online Hip Hop Style Page, 'Hey hey hey wut is goin' down with this shit???? Not all of us here are blacc, alright.'⁶ Like their British counterparts in Hewitt's work, they often 'fail to perceive the social and political aspects of the culture or fail to be sensitive to the issue of group boundaries' (Hewitt 1986: 48).

Some of the complicated cross-currents involved in this process showed up in an interview with Mike (aged 16) and his (white) friends Funny, Joey and Nikki. Mike had heavily bought into elements of African American culture, but he didn't show that he understood or respected any declaration of limits or conditions to his participation. Instead, he and his friends seemed at times to demand the erasure of differences in race and class history and position. At one point, they complained about what they viewed as 'anti-white skits' and overt demonstrations of black pride on black television programs such as 'Def Comedy Jam', and in the process united relatively 'straight', unperformed uses of AAVE (line 3) with its use in parody and caricature (lines 21–33):

10. Interview with Mike (age 16) and friends (Funny, Joey, and Nikki)⁷

- 1 Funny: And I also think that there's a lot of racism from
 2 blacks to whites.
 3 Mike: **Yeah, hell yeah, like a lot.**
 [jɪɛ hæ jɪɛ laɪk ə'lɛt]
 4 Funny: Like if you watch 'Def Comedy Jam' or anything
 5 there always making cracks about whites but if a
 6 white guy gets up on the stage says a little joke I
 7 mean you're gonna have Reggie Jackson knocking at
 8 his door or JESSE Jackson you know (.) with the
 9 whole rainbow coalition. you know, I'm
 10 not racist, but I, I think there's a lot of.=
 11 Mike: =And like I hate the way, I hate the way they
 12 they completely separate themselves. When you
 13 have that, like (.) I'm glad you brought that up. 'Def
 14 Comedy Jam', I HATE THAT SHOW. Like you see
 15 a freekin' (.) like (.) that's what I call a **jigaboo**, a
 16 person ((loud laughter)) no, no, no that's what I
 17 call a person, when they when they seclude
 18 themselves they're they're just as bad, that's that's
 19 what I call **boom**, a bastard, because they go up
 20 there and they have a '*Black as Hell*' white shirt,
 21 white sweat shirt and there up there, "**Yo, man,**
 22 **you know I was walkin' down the street the**
 23 **other day and I was wit my girl Juanita**"=
 24 Funny: ="**wit my fuckin' BITCH!**"
 25 Mike: ="**you know! An' wit Juanita, you know, I**
 26 **was jus chillin' you know, my BLACK girl,**
 27 **my BLACK princess, my BLACK**"=
 28 Funny: ="**My BITCH!**"
 29 Mike: ="**and I emphasize twenty more times that**
 30 **she's black ((laughter)) to make sure**
 31 **everybody knows that she's black ((laughter))**
 32 **because I don't want anyone to think I had**
 33 **to do with white!"**

- 34 Funny: Yeah, yeah!
 35 Mike: **You know?** That's exactly how they are.

A little later, uneasiness about their own race and class identity showed itself:

11. Interview with Mike, Funny, Joey, and Nikki:

- 1 Mike: Yeah, I mean ((tooth sucking)) I have a lot of
 2 friends that are of other races and I don't care but
 3 once I hear somebody say you know, "**Oh, word-**
 4 **up, black pride**" then they like become another
 5 thing for me. Then I see 'em then I see 'em
 6 different, then I see 'em much different.
 7 Joey: [Or "**White boy!**" I
 8 hate that shit, when they say white boy to me,
 9 there's like if I walk around and like um you know
 10 in a nice outfit, "**Hey white boy,**" just cause I'm
 11 in a nice or or because I'm in a private school, this is
 12 my favorite thing, or I, I've gotten into arguments
 13 like you know, it's come close you know? You you
 14 remember "**oh, white boy**" you know "**from a**
 15 **private school**" you know . . .

But desire for the neutralization of all social difference certainly wasn't a steady principle, and elsewhere boundaries of class and race were stressed in mockery of whites who 'want to be black'. During the same group session Mike and his friends mentioned the 'Yorkville crew' in response to a question about 'wannabes' – Yorkville, Mike's neighborhood, encompasses the upper east side of Manhattan and is demographically upwards of 90 percent white, and the Yorkville crew are all white:

12. Interview with Mike, Funny, Joey, and Nikki:

- 1 Joey: You see, **nah**, I'm sayin' you see a lot of kids who
 2 live down here ((Yorkville)) who wished they lived
 3 there ((Harlem)) (.) you see a lot of kids running
 4 around here who look like they want to be up from
 5 up there you know (.) like you see like all these like
 6 (.)
 7 Joey: They ((the Yorkville crew)) go around, like these
 8 these these these rich, white kids go around robbin'
 9 kids. I mean it's like so stupid (.) and they only rob
 10 kids when they have like
 11 fifteen or twenty kids in a gang.
 12 Mike: [They like, they like have their own
 13 crew 'n shit, and like every (.) and then every night,
 14 like every other night they all hang out like all two
 15 hundred of 'em by the Metropolitan Museum at night
 16 time.

these groups or that they would think he himself had been involved with the Yorkville Crew.

At first glance one might conclude that young whites embracing hip-hop represents a cultural rapprochement between blacks and whites and perhaps even the creation of a new multi-ethnic youth culture. But, Mike's relationship to African Americans was more complex and more subject to competing pulls. From a position of remoteness from the realities of lower class urban life, he wanted very much to define and participate in an essentialized version of urban black male youth culture, but he was uncomprehending about the restrictions, angered about rejection, and worried about being labeled a 'wannabe' by his peers.

6. CONCLUSION

White appropriation of black cultural forms is certainly not a new phenomenon, and the language, the music and fashions of black culture have long provided a rich source of inspiration for whites and others in the US and around the world. Indeed, there is little that the case study of a single individual can say about the general development of new trends in this relationship. Labov might be right that there is growing divergence between black and white vernaculars, that this is 'symptomatic of a split between the black and white portions of our society' (1987: 10), and as one factor within this, African Americans may be pulling away from white attempts to imitate them, as in the rhythms of appropriation and divergent innovation suggested by Giles (1979). Even so, a case like Mike's can usefully remind us that in spite of its reductive oversimplification of the sources that it targets, the adolescent construction of 'style' can involve tense negotiations of the relationship between self and other. Styling like Mike's may not match the standards of authenticity laid out in traditional sociolinguistics, and there may be major limits to the political understanding that accompanies it, but both personally and socially, its origins are complex, its consequences can be serious, and although its representativeness can't be stated systematically, it is not an isolated instance.

NOTES

1. I thank Ben Rampton, Renée Blake and John Singler for their encouragement, assistance and comments throughout the writing and revising of this paper.
2. According to Rose (1994b), 'hip hop culture emerged as a source of alternative identity formation and social status for youth' that started in the South Bronx in the early 1970s (1994b: 74). Its central forms are graffiti, breakdancing and rap music. 'Alternative local identities were formed in fashions and language, street names and most importantly, in establishing neighborhood crews or posses. The crew, a local source of identity, group affiliation and support system, appears in virtually all rap

lyrics and cassette dedications, music video performances and media interviews with [rap] artists.' (Rose 1994b: 78).

3. I adopt Morgan's (1994) definition of AAVE as the language varieties used by people in the US whose major socialization has been with US residents of African descent but would like to specify that it is a particular variety of AAVE that young whites are targeting: that variety of AAVE used by rap and hip-hop artists.
4. Expressions from on-line rap dictionary: http://www.sci.kun.nl:80/thalia/rapdict/dict_en.html

ayite	'all right'
bitch	'woman, girl' (pejorative)
bomb	'excellent, great'
boom	pre-sequence emphatic expression or filler
bro'	'brother, friend'
buggin'	'going crazy'
chill	'calm down'
dat shit	'that shit'
dope	'good, great'
frontin'	'trying to seem/appear'
hell yeah	'yes indeed'
ill	'weird, obnoxious'
jigaboo	'black person' (pej.); nigga (pej.)
mad	'very'
nigga	'fellow black brother' or pejoratively
phat	'good, great'
steppin' to	'to be aggressive'
whassup?; what up?	'what's up?'
word up; word	'for real; in fact; indeed'
yo	tag expression
you know?	'do you understand?'
wack	'weak, stupid'

5. Yet the existence of 'rap dictionaries' on the internet is highly contested. Rebensdorf (1996) observes that while some on-line discussions argue in favor of dictionaries in order to understand rappers' lyrics, others complain that rap dictionaries defeat the purpose of using hip-hop slang and that the role of rap is not to teach outsiders, but to communicate within their community (Rebensdorf 1996).

6. <http://www.streetsound.com/style/fashhiphop.html>

7. Conventions used in Transcriptions

[]	IPA phonetic transcription
[overlapping turns
=	latching
(.)	pause of less than one second
(1.5)	approximate length of pause in seconds
CAPITALS	loud enunciation
(())	stage directions
()	speech inaudible
Bold	instance of crossing of central interest in discussion

8. Bucholtz (1996) cites similar examples in which white teens 'mark black' in order to parody the speech of other whites who routinely employ AAVE speech patterns.

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