AN EARLY STUDY OF THE SPEECH OF YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA: WHY IT MATTERS

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the significance and contents of Stanley Legum, Carol Pfaff, Gene Tinnie, and Michael Nicholas's 1971 report, *The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles*. Although it is one of the first four substantial, quantitative sociolinguistic studies of AAVE nationwide and the only one from the West Coast, it was never formally published and remains essentially unknown and uncited. However, it is significant as one of the earliest studies of the speech of young (K–4th grade) African American children, as a potential reference point for studies of change in real time and for its implications for applied sociolinguistics—what we can do to improve the reading abilities and school success of African American and other vernacular English speakers. After an overview of the phonological and grammatical features covered by Legum et al., it discusses their findings with respect to the simplification of word-final consonant clusters ending in *t* and *d*, copula absence, and invariant habitual *be*. It then summarizes the authors' findings and their assessment of its educational implications and discusses a searing "minority dissent" by Gene Tinnie, one of the two African Americans coauthors. Tinnie's contrarian opinions and fears turn out to have significant echoes in more recent sociolinguistic work that urges researchers to consider similarities with standard English as well as differences from it, to be mindful of how educators might overuse the differences our descriptions pinpoint, and to remember the larger contexts of poverty-stricken and racism-plagued communities in which AAVE-speaking students live and go to school.

THE YEARS 1968–72 were watershed years in the study of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), producing the first four substantial, quantitative, community-based sociolinguistic descriptions of this distinctive variety. In 1968, Labov coauthored with Cohen, Robins, and Lewis a two-volume *Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto-Rican Speakers in New York City*. Despite the "Puerto-Rican" reference in its title, the 1968 study was almost entirely about the vernacular speech of African American teenagers and a smaller group of adults in Harlem, analyzing in detail how their phonology, grammar, and language use in narratives and verbal routines differed from those of standard English (SE) speakers. The study was sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, and one of its aims, like those of other contemporary

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linguistic collections and commentaries on vernacular and Creole English (Stewart 1964; Le Page 1968; Baratz and Shuy 1969) was to show that these varieties were rule-governed and to explore whether their systematic differences from SE could help to explain and reduce difficulties with reading and writing SE experienced by vernacular and creole students in schools. In 1969, Wolfram, building on an earlier study of Detroit by Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley (1967), published *A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech.* This study, also sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, analyzed many of the phonological and grammatical features studied by Labov and his colleagues, as used by preadolescents, teenagers, and adults. In 1971 Legum, Pfaff, Tinnie, and Nicholas released a 172-page technical report titled *The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles.* And in 1972, Fasold published his community study of AAVE in Washington D.C., noting explicitly that it could "appropriately be considered a sequel to two previous detailed studies of urban black speech: William Labov et al. 1968 and Walt Wolfram 1969" (ix).

Wolfram (1974, 498) lists these four works—Labov et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969), Legum et al. (1971), and Fasold (1972)—as the earliest "extensive sociolinguistic studies of various aspects of black varieties in Northern urban areas." But the Legum et al. study—issued by the Southwest Regional Laboratory as a technical report—is far less familiar to sociolinguistics and AAVE scholars than the others. That report is the subject of this article.

LEGUM ET AL. (1971): WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS

Like its predecessors, the Legum et al. report had an EDUCATIONAL SPONSOR (Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, or SWRL) and covered many of the same phonological and grammar features, quantitatively analyzed. But it differed from the others in that it was based on fewer speakers and conducted in California rather than in the East or Midwest. Unlike the Wolfram and Fasold studies, it was never published, although a version of it is available through ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center (http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED057022). Labov et al.'s (1968) report was never published by an external conventional publishing press either, but it was widely circulated, and many of its findings appeared in print in Labov (1972a).[1] In addition to being unpublished, Legum et al. (1971) was not widely known nor cited. I got what appears to be an earlier version of their report from the late Mike Nicholas, one of the coauthors and then a lecturer in Russian and linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where I did my B.A. in sociolinguistics. A copy of this earlier

report is available online accompanying this article (http://americanspeech.dukejournals.org/content/89/1/121.suppl/DC1). (Throughout this article, Legum et al.'s report is referenced generally as Legum et al. 1971; when it is necessary to distinguish between the two versions, my earlier version from Nicholas is referenced as 1971a and the presumably later version available through ERIC as 1971b.) I also got my now-dog-eared copy of Labov et al. (1968) from Nicholas and realized it had served as a model for the Los Angeles study.

Although Legum et al.'s *The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles* remains relatively unknown, it is important for several reasons. Why? Well, in a state that would later (1996–97) become the focus of national and international attention for its Oakland Ebonics controversy (see Baugh 2000; J. Rickford and R. Rickford 2000) and, more quietly, for the innovative California State Board of Education (2007) document that recognizes a significant role for AAVE in schools, it demonstrates that scholars had been aware of the distinctiveness of AAVE and its educational implications 25–40 years earlier. (For other early California studies of AAVE and education, see Melmed 1970 and Piestrup 1973.)

Legum et al. (1971) is also important because it provided one of the earliest studies of the speech of young black children anywhere in the country. Studies of how black kids acquire their vernacular are relatively rare (but see Green 2011 and the references therein). The Harlem and Detroit studies mentioned above focused on preadolescents, teenagers, and adults, while the Los Angeles study focused on school-aged children from kindergarten to third grade. Together with Henrie's (1969) dissertation, the Legum et al. study (and Pfaff's 1973 dissertation based on conversational, elicitation and production task data from the same school site) extended our early knowledge of children's usage to the preschool and elementary years, as table 1 shows.

One age-related suggestion from this early study has been corroborated in more recent studies by Craig and Washington (2006) in Michigan and by Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010) in North Carolina: black children's speech may get more vernacular as they move from kindergarten to higher grades and then to high school. As Legum et al. (1971a, 108) note:

> Some of the differences between the Los Angeles elementary school children and the New York teenagers are undoubtedly due to age differences. Although it cannot as yet be proven, there are some indications within the current data that suggest that many nonstandard forms are learned after children enter school. For example, the greatly increased use of the stigmatized form *ain't* by third graders as compared to kindergarten children may be such an acculturation to lower class norms. [also Legum et al. 1971b, 103, but with slightly different wording]

TABLE 1
Age Groups from Preschool to Adult Covered by Early Studies of AAVE

	Henrie (1969), San Francisco Bay Area, Calif.	*Legum et al. (1971), Los Angeles, Calif.*	*Wolfram (1969), Detroit, Mich.*	*Labov et al. (1968), Harlem, N.Y.*
Ages 4–5	Preschoolers			
Ages 6–7		Kindergartners		
Ages 7–8		First graders		
Ages 8–9		Second graders		
Ages 9–10		Third graders		Thunderbirds
Ages 10–12			Preadolescents	Thunderbirds, Cobras
Teens 13–19			Teens 14–17	Jets, Cobras, Oscar Bros.
Adults 20–39			Adults 30–55	Adults 20–39
Adults 40+				Adults 40+

Although the authors' conflation of "lower class norms" with nonstandard usage is neither explained or justified, their data do suggest that the increase in *ain't* over time was influenced by peer-group usage at school.

The Legum et al. study was also valuable for suggesting, albeit with some hedging, that there was a relatively uniform or at least similar vernacular variety of African American English nationwide. As the authors observe:

> The facts reported […] clearly establish that there is a Los Angeles version of a national Black English dialect of American English. The Los Angeles dialect may or may not be identical to that of New York and Detroit and elsewhere. The children interviewed in Los Angeles differ in many respects from the teenagers interviewed in New York and the adults who comprise the majority of the sample in Detroit. Until comparable populations have been interviewed, the identity of the dialects of each region must remain an open question.
>
> Nevertheless, the existence of a national dialect is established in the sense that whenever speakers of BE [Black English] differ in their usage from speakers of AE [American English], they differ along the same dimensions no matter what part of the country they come from. All speakers may not differ along all of these dimensions; and speakers differ by geographic areas as to how frequently variable rules are applied. [1971a, 108; also 1971b, 103, but with slightly different wording and missing the first two sentences]

In recent years, the assumption of a relatively uniform AAVE has been questioned, with regional variations, especially in phonology, being revealed (see Wolfram 2007; Yaeger-Dror and Thomas 2010). But in 1971, with major

descriptions of AAVE emanating primarily from the East, Midwest, and South, Legum et al.'s California study was helpful in confirming the relative uniformity of AAVE nationwide, particularly at the grammatical level. At the same time, the authors displayed an awareness of some degree of regional or geographical variation.

Finally, Legum et al.'s study is invaluable because it offers us a potential window on longitudinal change in real time, allowing us to compare 1971 and current samples of AAVE in California to determine whether it has changed over the past 40 or more years. The only two longitudinal studies of AAVE in California to date (Baugh 1996; J. Rickford and Price 2013) suggest age grading—a cyclic pattern in which speakers use less vernacular and more SE as they mature from teenagers to working adults and parents—rather than change in community norms. But with Legum et al.'s data, the picture might change. Ideally, one would want to draw not just on the speech of the 12 children analyzed for Legum et al.'s preliminary report, but on the recordings of all 36 children recorded (but not analyzed) in the full study. Although some of the materials have been lost or discarded over the years, Richard Berdan tells me he has boxes of tape recordings from the 1971 Los Angeles study, and Tyler Kendall and Walt Wolfram have expressed interest in helping to get them digitized and made available to scholars for online study via the North Carolina Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project [NCSLAAP] at North Carolina State University (http://ncslaap.lib.ncsu.edu/; see Kendall 2007).

THE CONTENTS OF LEGUM ET AL. (1971)

Now that we've established the importance of this early study of the speech of young black children in Los Angeles, what does it actually contain? Table 2 shows the phonological and grammatical features covered in Legum et al. (1971), compared with those covered in Labov et al. (1968) and Wolfram (1969). It reveals the significant overlap among them, and especially the intellectual debt that the Legum et al. study owes to the Labov et al. study, not only in terms of which phonological and grammatical features were addressed, but also the sequence in which they were covered. Legum et al. also contains a third section on the lexicon (87–106) that says more about features like *ain't*, *have/had*, and invariant habitual *be* (e.g., *He be here on Sundays* 'He's usually here on Sundays') than one finds in the grammatical section of Labov et al. And it ends with a hefty appendix (111–70), indicating how often each word occurs in its 25,794-word sample, overall, and broken down by grade.[2]

TABLE 2

Phonology and Grammar Coverage in Legum et al. (1971) and Its Predecessors

Topic/Feature	*Legum et al. (1971a)*	*Labov et al. (1968)*	*Wolfram (1969)*
Phonology			
Consonant cluster simplification with dentals, as in *fis(t)*, *han(d)*	17–29	123–57	57–82
Deleting plural, possessive, verbal, and adverbial *s*, as in *hat(s)*)	29–33	158–73	134–52
s + consonant realizations (*st*, *sk*, *ks*, *s*), as in *tes(t)*	33–34	131–33	
Assibilation (*that's* → *tha's*, etc.)	34–37	180–81	
r and *l* vocalization, as in *doo(r)*, *poo(l)*	37–40	*r* 99–107 *l* 113–19	*r* 109–19
Merging vowels before *r* (*ihr/her* as in *beer/bare*; *uhr/ohn* as in *poor/pour*)	40–44	107–13	
Verbal *-ing* → *-in*, as in *runnin(g)*	44–45	120–22	
Merging front vowels before nasals, so that *pin* and *pen* sound alike, like *pin*	45–46	119–20	
Producing *th,dh* as *t,d* as in *toot(h)*, *den*	47–49	92–99	82–95
Syllable-final *d* (devoicing, deletion after a vowel, with *hood* → *hoot* or *hoo*')			95–109
Sociolinguistic function of the phonological variables (discussion)			109–29
Grammar			
Copula (full, contraction, deletion, be_2), as in *he is ill*, *he's ill*, *he Ø ill*, *he be ill*	50–59, 99–103	174–246	
Verb agreement (with main verbs, *is*, and *was*, as in *he walk(Ø)*, *they is*, *we was*)	59–66, 98	246–53	
Realizations of *have* as *has*, *have*, *had*, *got*, as in *he have one*, *we got good*	91, 95–98	254	
Negative forms (use of *ain't* for *isn't*, *haven't*, *didn't*, etc., as in *he ain't here*)	89–94	255–57	
Irregular pasts, including finites for nonfinite verbs, as in *he brung it*, *let him did it*		257–60	
Modals (including use of *could* for *can*)	66–68	260–66	
Negative concord (*he didn't eat none*)	69–73	267–90	
Questions (especially with subject/verb noninverted, as in *You was back there?*)	73–75	291–300	
Conjunction (coordinate, subordinate)	75–79		
Relative clauses, as in *the man who ate*	79		
Comparatives, superlatives, equatives, as in *bigger*, *biggest*	80–81		
Indirect discourse	81–82		
Quotation	82–83		
Other (articles, pleonasm, existential)	84–87	301–9	

Legum et al.'s study differs from its predecessors, as a glance at the range of page numbers in table 2 shows, mainly in its briefer coverage of each topic. It is, as the authors note, a PRELIMINARY report, and many of the details of linguistic and social conditioning the other studies contained (e.g., the effect of following consonants or vowels on the simplification of consonant clusters or the effect of gender and social class) are missing, either because the authors had not gotten to them yet or because they were not a part of the study. However, its coverage of some of the central features is quite detailed and informative, and for the rest of this article, I'll concentrate on Legum et al.'s coverage of two classic AAVE features: (1) The simplification or reduction of clusters of two or more word-final clusters ending in *t* or *d*, as in *fast* pronounced *fas'* or *hand* pronounced *han'*; and (2) the absence of *is* and *are*, as in *he Ø bad*, *we Ø talkin*, often referred to as copula (and auxiliary *be*) absence.

SIMPLIFICATION OF WORD-FINAL CONSONANT CLUSTERS ENDING IN *T* OR *D*

As most readers of this journal know, word-final consonant cluster simplification refers to a fairly widespread process in colloquial English in which the final *t* or *d* is deleted in words like *fast* or *hand* that end in a "cluster" of two or more same-voiced consonants. While it's common in many dialects, this process tends to be more frequent in AAVE than in corresponding White Vernacular English.

Table 3 shows us how often such consonant cluster simplification occurred in the speech of young black children in Los Angeles in 1971, with comparable Harlem data from Labov et al. (1971). Almost everyone who has studied consonant cluster simplification has found that it's less frequent when the final *t* or *d* represents the past-tense marker, as in *passed* (which contains grammatical information that could be lost if the *-ed* is deleted) than when it does not, as in *past* and *hand* (see Labov 1972b, 219; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 181). Table 3 shows that this was also true in the Los Angeles data, with simplification occurring half as often (32%) in clusters that included a past-tense *-ed* as in clusters that did not (64%) and that comparable differences were found in Labov et al.'s study in Harlem. However, while the percentage of simplification in the Los Angeles and Harlem samples is about the same for past-tense clusters (with the exception of the Thunderbirds), the percentage of simplification in Los Angeles for monomorphemic or non-past-tense clusters is significantly lower than in any of the three Harlem samples.[3]

TABLE 3
Simplification of Word-Final Consonant Clusters Ending in *t* or *d* in Early Studies in Los Angeles and Harlem, in Past-Tense and Monomorphemic Environments

	Past-Tense Clusters (e.g., passed)	*Monomorphemic or Non-Past-Tense Clusters (e.g., last)*
Legum et al. (1971a, 24, table 8), Los Angeles[a]		
K–3rd graders	30/95 (32%)	440/684 (64%)
Labov et al. (1968, 128, table 3-6), Harlem		
Thunderbirds, 9–12 years old	64/119 (54%)	178/204 (87%)
Jets, 14–17 years old	81/284 (29%)	408/465 (88%)
Working-class adults	122/354 (34%)	352/470 (75%)

a. The token numbers differ slightly in the ERIC version (Legum et al. 1971b, 16, table 9), but the percentages are very similar: past-tense clusters, 30/95 (32%); monomorphemic, 436/633 (69%).

One other point: observers have often (but not always) found that there is more consonant cluster simplication in casual style than in careful style. Legum et al.'s way of checking for stylistic variation was to compare children's speech when an adult was present (possibly more careful or inhibited) with their speech when no adult was present (possibly more casual). In many of their data tables, rows containing data from recordings where no adults were present were labeled "00," and rows with data from recordings with one or more adults present were labeled "01" or "02," depending on the number of adults present. For first, second, and third graders combined—there was no comparable data for kindergartners—a significant stylistic difference was found for monomorphemic, non-past-tense clusters like the final one in *fast*, with students simplifying their clusters 52% of the time (96/184) when no adult was present, but 69% of the time (340/487) when an adult was present (Legum et al. 1971a, 27–28, tables 10 and 11).[4] This is a statistically significant difference, but opposite from the direction we might have predicted, with the children showing more consonant cluster simplification when adults were present (and potentially inhibiting free conversation) than when they were absent. Note, however, that all of the children's data in this study come from GROUP recordings, which have often been found to produce more vernacular speech and to override formalizing aspects of the recording context (see Labov et al. 1968). Perhaps the group ambience when the third graders were recorded was sufficiently informal to overcome the inhibiting presence of an adult. Note the authors' comment on individual vs. group recordings:

Individual interviews with the subjects produced highly self-conscious speech. Most of a child's conversation during an individual interview was monosyllabic and generally non-responsive . . . Relatively little data from individual interviews was collected and NONE is included in the twelve tape samples discussed in the present report. [1971a, 14, emphasis added; also 1971b, 6, although with slightly different wording]

COPULA ABSENCE: THE ABSENCE OF *IS* AND *ARE*, AS IN *HE Ø BAD*, *WE Ø TALKIN*

In sentences like *he is bad* and *we are in the house*, the verbs *is* and *are* LINK or join the subjects (*he*, *we*) and their predicates (*bad*, *in the house*). For this reason they are called "copulas" (from Latin *copulare* 'to link', the same root from which we get English *copulate*). As Ferguson (1971) and Pullum (1997) have noted, several major languages (e.g., Arabic, Russian) don't use copulas in sentences like these, especially in the present tense. AAVE uses them optionally, with the inflected forms *is* and *are* often absent, as in *he Ø bad*, *we Ø in the house*. As we've known since Labov et al. (1968, 174–220) and Labov (1969), this feature is variable, but not random. For example, you can't delete *am*, *was*, or *were*, and you can't delete *is* or *are* at the ends of sentences (**That's what he Ø*!). Copula and auxiliary *is/are* absence is one of the most studied and best-known features of AAVE.

So it was not surprising that Legum et al. (1971) would begin their discussion of the grammar of young black children in Los Angeles by focusing on this feature. Table 4 amalgamates and reorganizes data from Legum et al. (1971a, 52–53, tables 31 and 32; 1971b, 56–57, tables 44 and 45) and compares them with similar data from other communities. It shows how often the children in these studies omitted the copula in all present-tense contexts, including those in which a full form (*is*, *are*) or a contracted form (*'s*, *'re*) could have occurred instead. The only variants I have excluded—in line with most modern analyses of copula absence in AAVE—are invariant *be* tokens, as in *he be bad* or *we be talkin*, which carry an additional meaning of habituality. We'll discuss invariant habitual *be* separately.

The first thing to note about the Los Angeles data is that the rates of *are*-deletion are much higher than the rates of *is*-deletion—more than twice as high on average, but six times as high for the second graders. This is the norm in most studies, as the Detroit data from Wolfram (1969) and the East Palo Alto data from J. Rickford et al. (1991) confirm. Indeed, some white vernaculars, especially in the South, allow *are*-deletion, but little or no *is*-deletion (see Wolfram 2003, 308).

TABLE 4
Copula Absence in Legum et al.'s (1971) study in Los Angeles and in Contemporary and Later Studies in Other Locations

	is-*Deletion*		are-*Deletion*		is + are-*Deletion*	
Legum et al. (1971a, 52–53, tables 31 & 32), Los Angeles, Calif.						
kindergarters (n = 3)	25/89	28%	20/27	74%	45/116	39%
1st graders (n = 3)	19/49	39%	4/5	80%	23/54	43%
2nd graders (n = 3)	6/41	15%	13/14	93%	19/55	35%
3rd graders (n = 3)	29/93	31%	13/15	87%	42/108	39%
TOTAL, K–3rd (n = 12)	79/272	29%	50/61	82%	129/333	39%
Labov et al. (1968, 192, table 3-12), Harlem, N.Y.[a]						
Thurderbirds, 9–12 years old (n = 7, 13)	261/676	39%				
Jets, 14–17 years old (n = 15, 28)	231/713	30%				
Oscar Bros., 15–19 years old (n = 4, 3)	119/305	39%				
adults (n = 15, 17)	81/588	14%				
Wolfram (1969, 169, fig. 47; 174, fig. 50), Detroit, Mich.						
lower working class (n = 12)		37%		69%		57%
upper working class (n = 12)		17%		47%		37%
lower middle class (n = 12)		5%		18%		11%
upper middle class (n = 12)		1%		8%		5%
Baugh (1979, 184, table 13; 192, table 17), Los Angeles, Calif.[b]						
mostly working & lower class, ages 21–54 (n = 9)						
familiar/vernacular	.514		.626			
unfamilir/vernacular	.489		.489			
familiar/nonvernacular	.472		.491			
unfamiliar/nonvernacular	.472		.383			
Rickford et al. (1991, 111, 117, tables 4, 6), East Palo Alto, Calif.[c]						
lower income, teenagers to senior citizens (n = 30)	256/483	53%	496/636	78%	752/1119	67%
Alim (2004, 154, table 5.5), Sunnyside, Calif.						
teens (n = 4)						
with unfamiliar whites					84/718	12%
with unfamiliar blacks					310/819	38%
with familiar black peers					190/235	81%
Rickford and Price (2013, 151, table 3), East Palo Alto, Calif. (1986 data)						
working-class teens (n = 2)					139/154	90%
working-class adults, ages 38–42 (n = 2)					72/192	38%
working-class retirees, ages 65+ (n = 2)					31/278	11%

TABLE 4 (CONT'D)
Copula Absence in Legum et al.'s (1971) study in Los Angeles and in Contemporary and Later Studies in Other Locations

	is-*Deletion*	are-*Deletion*	is + are-*Deletion*
Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010), Piedmont, N.C. (1994–2004 data)[d]			
children, age 48 months–6th grade (n = 32)			
as preschoolers		277/701	40%
as 1st graders		42/307	14%
as 4th graders		32/316	10%
as 6th graders		203/607	33%

a. In the data from Labov et al (1968), first n in parentheses is the number of speakers in group style, second n is the number in single style; percentages's are for both styles combined.
b. Baugh's (1979) data are presented as variable rule factor weights, which range from 0 to 1, with those above .5 indicating variables that favor deletion and those below .5 indicating variables that disfavor it.
c. Data from Rickford et al. (1991) are for "Labov Deletion," where the number of deletions is divided by the number of contractions and deletions (D/C+D). In the other studies, copula absence is computed by the formula for "Straight Deletion," where the number of deletions is divided by the number of full forms, contractions, and deletions (D/F+C+D). See Rickford et al. (1991) for discussion of the rationale for and history of these methods.
d. Data provided by Van Hofwegen (pers. comm, Nov. 9, 2012).

Second, note that the overall rate of *is* + *are*-deletion in Los Angeles (39%) is similar to the rate for the upper-working-class speakers in Wolfram's Detroit data (37%), although the Los Angeles *are*-deletion rate (82%) is higher than the rates for both the upper working (47%) AND lower working classes (69%) in Detroit.

Third, note that the speakers' socioeconomic class matters. In the Wolfram data from Detroit, the rates for *is* + *are*-deletion decline steadily as we go from the lower working class (57%) to the upper middle class (5%). Race matters too. In both the Labov et al. and Wolfram studies, white speakers in the area surveyed (Inwood teens in Manhattan, upper-middle-class whites in Detroit, resp.) show no copula absence. (However, working-class whites in Aniston, Alabama [Feagin 1979, 249–50], show 35–56% *are*-absence and 6–7% *is*-absence.)

Fourth, note from Alim's (2004) data from Sunnyside, a community contiguous with East Palo Alto, California, that recording context or style matters too, especially the familiarity and race of one's addressee. Alim's

Africa American Sunnyside teens in table 4 vary from a high of 80% *is* + *are*-deletion when speaking with familiar black peers to a low of 11% when speaking with unfamiliar whites.

Fifth, age seems to matter too, with J. Rickford and Price (2013, 151) showing an even more precipitous decline in the copula absence of East Palo Altans in California as we go from the teenagers (94%) to the adults (38%) and retirees (11%). Similarly, Wolfram's (1969, 179, fig. 53) lower-working-class preadolescents and teens, in data not shown in table 4, delete *is* and *are* 65% and 68% of the time, respectively, compared with 38% for adults. Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010), echoing earlier work by Craig and Washington (2006), describe a roller-coaster trajectory, in which first graders drop from a previously high preschool use of vernacular features to a lower rate, which increases steadily again as they go from first grade to high school. And Labov et al.'s (1968) teenage peer groups delete two to three times as often (30–39%) as their adults do (14%). This is the situation, to some extent, with the copula deletion of the 32 African American children from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute study from which Van Hofwegen and Wolfram drew the data in table 4. But the Legum et al. data, if we look at the combined *is* + *are*-deletion column, don't show the dramatic or steady change with age associated with the "roller coaster pattern." The roller coaster pattern is confirmed to some extent in Labov et al.'s *is*-deletion data in table 4 (they did not collect *are*-deletion data), insofar as the youngest and oldest age groups there (Thunderbirds and Oscar Brothers, respectively) have the same *is*-deletion rate of 39%, while the intermediate Jets group show a lower rate of 30%. But there is no theoretical expectation that the roller coaster pattern of elementary school would repeat in high school, and the fact that the different Harlem age groups also represent different peer-groups, with different styles and philosophies, should caution us about attributing this variability to age alone. Overall, the average *is*-deletion rate of the Los Angeles kids in 1971 (29%, 79/272) is comparable to that of Labov et al.'s Harlem Jets (30%, 231/713). This is striking given that the former are so much younger (6–10 vs. 14–17 years old). It increases the potential interest of studying the 24 OTHER children in Los Angeles whose recordings were not analyzed for the preliminary report in 1971, and mounting a new study of African American children's copula absence in Los Angeles for a longitudinal perspective on change in that community over time.

A FEW NOTES ON INVARIANT HABITUAL *BE*

In addition to copula absence, the young black children in Los Angeles studied in Legum et al. (1971) were fairly frequent users of one of the most distinctive features of AAVE, invariant habitual *be* (originally called be_2 to distinguish it from inflected be_1: *am*, *is*, *are*, etc.) Examples include:

a. Sometimes I BE a leader. [kindergartener, 100]
b. They legs BE cold. [first grader, 101]
c. And if, when they pick up a [card], it BE little. [second grader, 102]
d. When I BE appetizing it BE a picture on [third grader, 101]

Three points about their use of this form are worth making. First, compared with the preschool and elementary children from North Carolina studied by Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010 (but recorded 10–14 years earlier), they used about the same number of examples (56 vs. 52, as table 5 shows). But since there were ten times as many children at each grade level in the North Carolina sample (32 to 3), the Los Angeles children must have been using be_2 much more often, at the individual level.

Second, as table 5 also makes clear, this feature is excellent for illustrating the curvilinear or roller coaster pattern. In the North Carolina data, the preschool level of 10 drops to 0 and 2 in first and fourth grade before soaring to 40 in the sixth grade (and to 62 in the eight grade, not tabulated here). In the California data, the initial dip is not as clear—the total remains 4 from K to first grade before falling to 1 in second grade—but the rise to 47

TABLE 5
Usage of Invariant Habitual *be* by Children in Los Angeles and North Carolina

	Invariant Habitual be
Legum et al. (1971), Los Angeles, Calif.	
kindergarters (n = 3)	4
1st graders (n = 3)	4
2nd graders (n = 3)	1
3rd graders (n = 3)	47
TOTAL, K–3rd (n = 12)	56
Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010), Piedmont, N.C. (1994–2004 data)	
children, age 48 months–6th grade (n = 32)	52
as preschoolers	10
as 1st graders	0
as 4th graders	2
as 6th graders	40

in the third grade is sharp and comparable to, even if earlier than, the rise to 40 in North Carolina's sixth grade. Legum et al. comment specifically on this: "Age-grading clearly is a factor for the occurrence of invariant *be*: the older children use be_2 much more frequently than the younger ones. Third grade usage amounts to 83+% of the total" (57).

Evidence that the Los Angeles children's use of invariant habitual *be* is more robust at the third-grade level than before comes from the finding, not shown in table 5, that it is only in the third grade that we see a consistent style-shift in the predicted direction, with the children using this feature much more often in casual contexts when no adult is present (45 examples) than in the more formal contexts where an adult is present (2 examples). This is one of the clearest cases of style-shifting in the report, and the authors comment on it specifically (57).

LEGUM ET AL.'S CONCLUSION, AND A MINORITY DISSENT

After 100+ pages of introduction to the project and analyses of pronunciation and grammar features, the "Discussion" section at the end is short, a single page. The authors begin (108) with two sociolinguistic observations cited above: (1) there is a Los Angeles version of AAVE, but it's similar to other versions of AAVE nationwide, and (2) the children's vernacular usage seems to increase as they get older, at least for some variables. They do make a third sociolinguistic point, however (1971a, 109):

> Once one realizes that dialect differences are not causes but symbols of cultural separation, it is a short step to recognize that scholastic difficulties, in particular reading difficulties, are not exclusively a function of nonstandard speech patterns. Rather, such difficulties are part and parcel of the cultural conflicts found in the society, and exaggerated in schools. [also 1971b, 103–4, but with slightly different wording and a different concluding sentence: "In all likelihood the attitudes of educators and students to linguistic and cultural differences play at least as important a part in scholastic failure as the differences themselves."]

This is reminiscent of the suggestion by Labov et al. (1968, 2: 339–46) and Labov and Robins (1969) that functional conflicts between AAVE speakers and schools might be more significant than structural ones.

Do the authors attempt to make a bigger educational point? Not really, but they do end with a thoughtful and thought-provoking paragraph, although it opens with a sentence we'd now consider sexist, and it contains points that many of us would agree with but wish the authors had developed further:

To deny a man his dialect is to deny him his identity as a group member. Better to recognize and understand dialect and other cultural differences for what they are than to attempt to eradicate them. Diversity in and of itself is not bad and can be good. Knowledge about the language and values of others should improve understanding, and could be recommended for all school children. Knowledge about the language and values of students from a different subculture is essential for the teacher to work effectively. [1971a, 109; also 1971b, 104, but with slightly different wording]

This is followed (in the version of the report given to me by Nicholas) by a "Separate Statement" (Legum et al. 1971a, 109–10) by Gene S. Tinnie, one of two African American coauthors on the research team.[5] (Tinnie's statement was left out of the presumably later version available through ERIC [Legum et al. 1971b].) Tinnie agrees that the speech characteristics of the 5–9 year old black children in LA described in the report are indeed "'systematic and rule governed' and not just random errors." And he concedes that making that point is "not without value, especially at a time when many educators at all levels are still unaware of it or unwilling to accept it." But for him, "this very unawareness or unwillingness […] is of primary concern," because it indicates that the "problem is far greater than the simple linguistic facts discussed in this report. The problem is racism, pure and simple."

Tinnie goes on to argue that while some feel that

institutionalized racism [might] be gradually worn away through a series of efforts, like Black Dialect studies. The question to be asked is whether any such effort carried on within the context of an inherently racist society […] can do more than contribute to, rather than solve the problem. The present paper is a case in point. [109–10]

By this stage, Tinnie's "separate statement" has become a full-fledged minority dissent, suggesting that the linguistic study might actually exacerbate the problem of African American school failure that it set out to solve. The reason? It is "all too easy to fall into the trap of now over-emphasizing the differences at the expense of the similarities," since the findings show "that the children who provide our sample speak a great deal of Standard Anglo English." And since he "suspect[s] that a 'control group' of white children of the same age would not, aside from the few dialect features, be significantly different from the black children studied here," there is "little percentage in pursuing ad infinitum the study of the dialect."

For Tinnie, the root problem is the cultural and economic differences that are "both the excuse for and the effect of America's inherent racism," and the required solution, "being demanded, in the Black community and all over the world, is the right to self-determination (and this means in schools) and an end to racism." Now the community control movement as

a solution to educational and other problems in the black community was particularly strong in New York City in the late 1960s, and coming from New York, Tinnie may well have been influenced by it. (See Podair [2002] and R. Rickford [forthcoming] for historians' account of that movement, and visit http://vimeo.com/18552929 for a recent interview with Tinnie, now Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, working as a visual artist in Florida.)

Some closing comments on Tinnie's brief but powerful minority dissent are in order. First, his fear that linguists and/or educators might "fall into the trap of now over-emphasizing the differences at the expense of the similarities" has been independently echoed both by Green (2013) and A. Rickford and J. Rickford (2010). Green, specifically concerned with the description of the English of African American children (like Legum et al.'s elementary school students and younger), notes that linguists too often focus exclusively on maximal differences from Standard American English [SAE], ignoring similarities to and subtle differences from" SAE in the children's speech. Not only do the resultant lists of differences "fall short in indicating what speakers actually know about their language" (Green 2013, 282), but they may also have "important classroom implications and application" (281), for instance in characterizing a child as switching from AAVE to SE when it might be better to see the child as operating within a single AAE system that includes both differences from and similarities to SE. A. Rickford and J. Rickford's concern is somewhat different. Having worked with the publishers of a new set of elementary readers that use Contrastive Analysis and other techniques to help speakers of AAVE master academic English, in response to the guidelines in California State Board of Education (2007), they worry that the resultant "Teacher Tips" accompanying specific stories and exercises might result in excessive interruption and correction:[6]

> [W]e harbor some anxiety that teachers using it might zero in on too many features, too relentlessly, forgetting the caution to ignore dialect differences unless they are relevant to the pedagogical focus of the lesson. Our goal [...] was to help teachers to develop linguistic versatility in their students. But might teachers using the new series—and others like it that the State Department of Education has mandated—become like the "Interrupting Teachers" Piestrup (1973) described, who harassed their AAVE-speaking students so much that they "withdrew from participation in reading, speaking softly and as seldom as possible" (pp. 131–2)? And might they actually produce lower reading scores[...]? [2010, 251]

Until studies are done of how educational materials like these are actually being used in classrooms—and I know of no such studies at present—it's difficult to know whether anxieties about the misuse of linguistic descriptions of AAVE are justified. But Tinnie was right to raise the concern about how linguistic studies of AAVE might be used in the classroom, and we would be

wrong to ignore it.

Second, although linguists cannot on our own end racism or effect the self-determination that Tinnie called for, he was also right to remind us of the larger school, community and society contexts in which the language and education problems we seek to address are embedded. As Charity Hudley (2013, 276) has pointedly noted:

> Most critically, sociolinguists cannot just "drop in" and do education-related research and out-reach in an effective and wide-scale manner. The approaches will seem disjointed, and the initiatives will often fail or be tainted with misunderstanding, as the Ebonics controversy and others suggest. Successful initiatives depend on building local alliances—for example, with just one colleague in education at a local college or university, one local organization, or one school. Another critical step is to find out who makes the decisions about educational changes in a given school, school district, city, state, or country and start with them to effect school and/or governmental policy change.

Similarly, Labov (2010, 20–24) has drawn attention to the endangered communities in which AAVE is alive and well, partly due to the effects of segregation, poverty, unemployment, crime, incarceration, underfunded schools, inadequate instruction, and other aspects of institutionalized racism (see especially his figure 6). In this context, the narratives recorded from AAVE-speaking children often reveal their anger, sadness, fear, or bitterness. Labov advocates creating reading materials that don't "deal with a happy, anodyne, and irrelevant world in which children take their sand buckets to the beach and dip their toes in the water" (22) but ones in which the conflicts, fears, and concerns of inner-city children are foregrounded. This is an underlying theme of the *Portals to Reading* reading program he developed with Houghton Mifflin, again in response to California State Board of Education's (2007) framework for reading/language arts materials that would include strategies to help students with special learning needs, including English learners and speakers of AAVE.[7] Finally, in my remarks at a recent AERA panel on Labovian Legacies: Sociolinguistics and Education (J. Rickford 2014), I emphasized the increasingly broad elements of linguistics, literacy, teaching, schools and communities that need to be kept in mind if sociolinguists' interventions on behalf of AAVE and other vernacular speakers are to be effective.

Third, it should be noted that Tinnie's dissent was cogently and expressively articulated and more radical than anything in the rest of Legum et al. (1971) or its major predecessors, Labov et al. (1968) and Wolfram (1969). The most similar, contemporaneously radical statement from a linguist I can find is Sledd's (1969) trenchant critique of bidialectalism. However, Tinnie's powerful voice may also have influenced the decision of the Child Language Survey Staff and SWRL not to pursue the linguistic analysis of the other

24 children they had sampled, ending the project with their "Preliminary Report" on 12 of the 36 children sampled. Carol Pfaff has observed (pers. comm., Nov. 12, 2012) that "SWRL wasn't interested in deeper sociolinguistic study but wanted some research that was more promising for teacher-relevant products." Perhaps Tinnie's statement and the activism of other SWRL linguists like Clyde Williams, who headed up the project in the interviewing phase, played a role in this decision as well.

Although SWRL ended the project on the speech of young black children in Los Angeles before it was fully complete, the study of AAVE in relation to the educational challenges experienced by its speakers, and speakers of pidgins, creoles, and other English vernaculars, did not end there. On the contrary, it has continued as a vibrant focus of research and publication up to the present, as the 1,600+ references in our new bibliography (J. Rickford et al. 2013) can attest. Interested readers might delve into the now vast literature on this subject and the many discoveries, debates, and proposed solutions—going far beyond Legum et al. (1971)—it has spawned.

NOTES

I wish to express my gratitude to Robert Berdan, Carol Pfaff, and Gene Tinnie for informative e-mails about the Legum et al. (1971) research project that's the focus of this paper, while absolving them of any responsibility for my observations and interpretations. I have not yet been able to reach Stanley Legum, the lead author. I also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for *American Speech*, whose comments and suggestions I found most helpful.

1. Although Labov (1972a) includes many of the findings and insights of Labov et al. (1968), it does not include all of them. I often turn to the earlier study for invaluable details and data and recommend to serious students of AAVE that they do the same.
2. The list takes up more than a third of the volume, but except for its coverage of grammatical forms like *ain't* and *be*, it doesn't seem particularly useful. (Knowing that *Leonard* occurs once in the corpus and *know* occurs 107 times is relatively uninformative to most linguists and educators.) The 25,794-word sample size is given on page 88. There it is also noted the number of words recorded per grade: kindergarten 10,024, first grade 2,991, second grade 3,056, third grade 9,858. The relatively low figures for the first and second grades are attributed to the fact that the three children chosen at random to represent those grades "were among the least talkative in their groups," while the children randomly chosen to represent the other grades were "among the most talkative."
3. Statistical significance for pairwise comparisons between the Los Angeles and Harlem groups range from $p = .007$ to $p = .0001$ by Fischer's exact test, two-tailed.

4. In the ERIC version, Legum et al. report different data, but the percentages are close and their difference still statistically significant: students simplify their clusters 58% of the time (116/200) when no adult was present and 73% of the time (320/433) when an adult was present (Legum et al. 1971b, 18–19, tables 11 and 12).
5. Mike Nicholas was the other African American coauthor, and in this respect Legum et al. (1971) paralleled Labov et al. (1968), two of whose author/researchers—John Lewis and Clarence Robbins—were also African American.
6. Here is an example of (part of) one such Teacher Tip, for a fifth-grade reading text in the *Imagine It! Reading* (Open Court) series: "AAVE speakers may pronounce the negatives in lines 1 and 2 without a final *t*, as *didn'* or *couldn'*. If you're trying to develop their competence in switching to mainstream or standard English in speaking or reading aloud, you may offer practice in pronouncing these words with a final *t*. If pronunciation is not the focus of your lesson, you may ignore this vernacular pronunciation, since speakers of different dialects regularly vary in how they read or pronounce written text" (A. Rickford and J. Rickford 2010, 251).
7. This remarkable but little known or commented upon California State Board of Education (2007) document "provides guidelines [to educators and publishers] for implementing instruction to ensure optimal benefits for all students, including those with special learning needs (e.g., English learners, students who use African American vernacular English, students with learning disabilities and reading difficulties, and advanced learners)" (2). Three hundred and eighty-six pages long, it is available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/documents/rlafw.pdf.

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