

# Coding for Sociolinguistic Archive Preparation

## “Interrogating African American”

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# Social and linguistic heterogeneity of the black population in the U.S.:

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- African Americans
- Caribbeans/West Indians and their children
- Afro-Latinos from South and Central America and their children
- African immigrants and their children
- Others

(Spears 1988, Zentella 1997; Waters 1999; Blake and Shousterman 2010)

# What are black immigrants and their children assimilating to?

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- Disappear into the larger American world like their white predecessors?
- Waters 1996:799:  
*if these immigrants [black] assimilate they assimilate to being not just Americans but Black Americans*
- The result: *Black eventually equals African American*
- In spite of problematizing this interchange between black and African American, we are caught in it

# What is black in the U.S. today?

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- Walk the streets of New York City over the past decade and you can easily hear a group of phenotypically black children benignly asking the question of each, “Are you black or Hispanic?”
- If black is not Hispanic then what else is black not in the U.S.? Opens up the field to other black ethnics falling out of the black/African American category
- Allows for us to justify us comparing apples to oranges: Latinos as the largest ethnic minority group over blacks/African Americans

(c.f., Morales 2004, Omni and Winant 2010)

# Thinking back about black people:

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Perhaps as social scientist we should take a page out of the Afro-latino movement and think about black people more accurately as in the past: people of African descent. This would allow for complicating race and ethnicity which are dynamic.

(Román and Flores 2010)

# Studying black communities:

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- Ethnography is critical
- Socio-historical backgrounds and ideologies
- The national imagination about social categories
- How people talk about themselves outside of the confines of the nation
- Explore how ethnic and cultural backgrounds and practices are related to how they speak
- Finding out about nuances n perceptions is key
- Various situations
- Researchers ideologies

# Taking a pulse of the Nation...

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<http://melanieamaroofficial.com/>

# The authentic reveal...

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jENnBZ11yg>

# Black New Yorkers

- SGCAs: Second generation Caribbean Americans whose parents migrated from the English-speaking Caribbean to the United States (also referred to as second generation West Indian Americans).
- Although born in the U.S., SGCAs often do not self-identify as African American, or African American only, but rather make reference to their West Indian ancestry.
- We examine the speech of SGCAs in New York, and compare it to that of their African American counterparts of U.S.-born parentage (USAAs, or native African Americans).

# Excerpt 1: DD, SGCA female, 20 years old

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DD: I keep telling you this, it's just like, when you're around West Indians, when you're around native West Indians, they treat you differently.

A: I forget how to speak Spanish!



DD: It's like your identity is not good enough, it's not valid, because you weren't born there, you don't know what we're talking about-



DD: Beyond the Caribbean Students Association, I'm involved in Black Family Reunion, which is an African American-based community service organization on campus and beyond that, also Lamda Pi Eta which is this this silly little Communications honor society. But (laughter) and you know identities are fluid so they kind of go back and forth but always cognizant of the fact that I consider myself to be a Grenadian American.

INT: Huh. You were kind of slow on the "American" there.

DD: Well I'm coming to terms with that. After learning I mean after you know researching and learning a lot about African Americans and just Americ- actually America in general, it's very hard to add that American in.

# The Study

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- Blake and Shousterman (2010) examines the realization of postvocalic /r/.
- We also analyze the realization of the vowels in the word classes BOUGHT and BOAT, in the English of second generation Caribbean Americans and native African Americans.
- The realizations of these three variables index various race, ethnicity, class and place identities in the U.S. and the West Indies:
  - ▣ Vocalized /r/ is often attributed to African American speech and English-lexifier Creoles (i.e., Creole English--excluding Bajan).
  - ▣ /r/-fulness indexes more formal speech and language associated with upper classes.
  - ▣ BOUGHT raising indexes New York City speech.
  - ▣ The BOAT word class has distinctive realizations in American English versus various dialects of Creole English, giving it geographical and in some cases stylistic distinctiveness.

# Summary of findings

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“Identities are fluid, so they kind of go back and forth.”

“I have loads of identities and they're all fine with me”.

- The findings for /r/, BOUGHT and BOAT provide evidence that Black New Yorkers are using linguistic resources available to them to do identity work on multiple levels.
- /r/-fulness is used to convey place identity for USAAs and SGCA, in addition to class prestige for SGCA.
- Raised BOUGHT is also used to convey place identity for both groups, but may also have qualitative subtleties that point to ethnic differentiation.
- A close acoustic look at BOAT reveals an SGCA using variants of this vowel that reveal complex sociolinguistic identities that are both American and Caribbean at the same time.

# Excerpt 1: DD introduces herself

My entire family is from Grenada. My mother's from Carriacou in Grenada and my father is from the larger island of- and he's from St. Georges which is the capital. And I was born here and- which is interesting cause I'm the oldest American-born on my mom's side so that's always an interesting dynamic cause they sometimes exclude me.



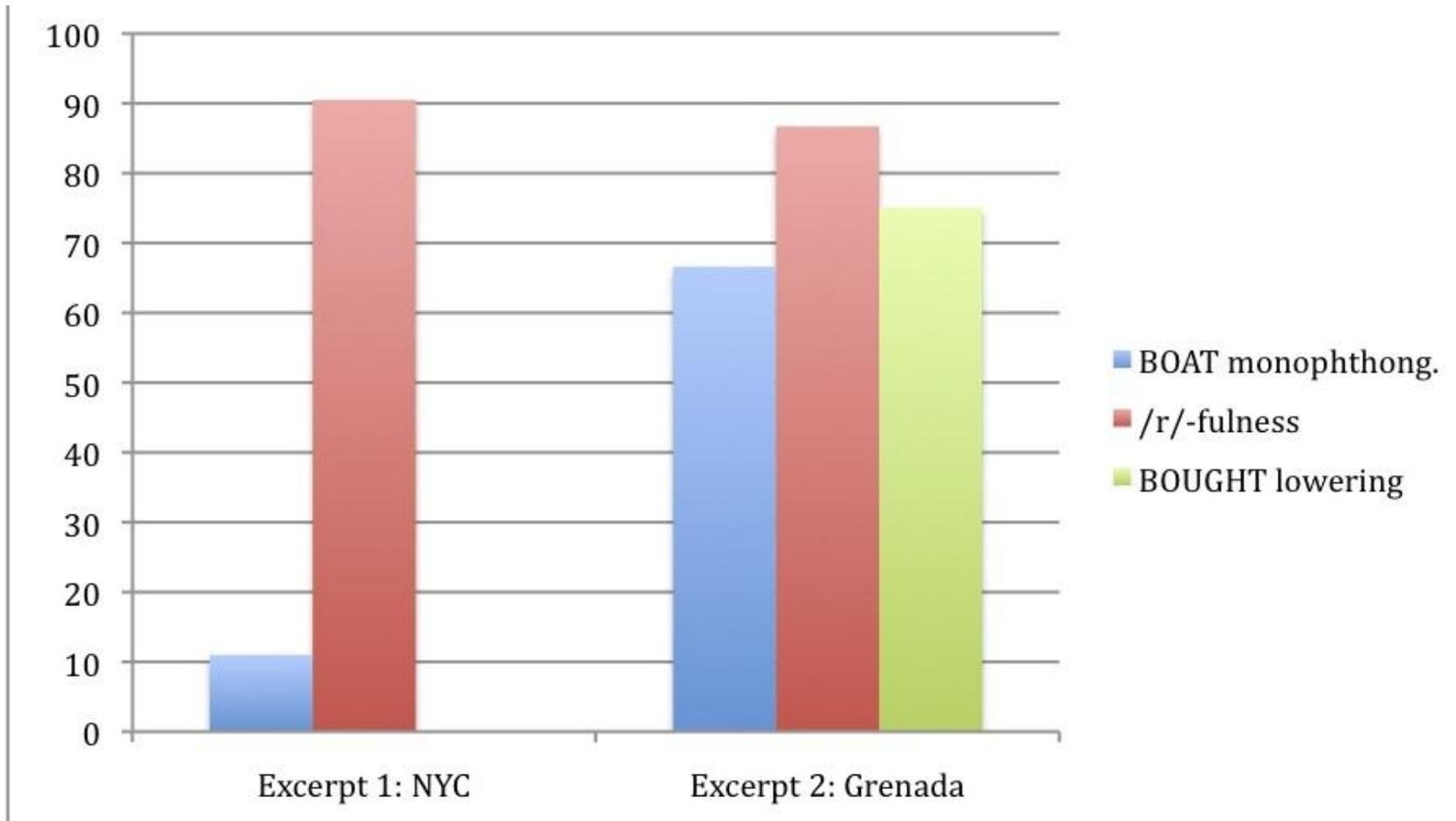
# Excerpt 2: DD's Caribbean identity

Actually *no* the only reason much like you it was like you *know* everyone kind of ostracized you because you weren't quite African American? And you *know* it wasn't being called *coconut* but they did tell me go back to Grenada and I was like but I wasn't born there I mean and that happened through through junior high and stuff like that 'cause I went to predominantly white school. So first they had to *negotiate* the idea that I was black and then the second idea that I was Caribbean and I kept talking about it and talking about it and that just bothered all hell out of them and then when I got to high school I met some other Caribbean students who had the exact same situation. Their parents thought that upward mobility meant sending them to a predominantly white school, Catholic school so they all had that same identity of being called, you *know* trying -being called sellouts and then having their African American friends and their West Indian friends like you *know*, disgusted with them so we all kind of merged off of that and we found pride in that and we started participating in DC carnival so that really helped it.



# Linguistic co-occurrence in DD's excerpts

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# Interrogating African American

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- In summary, we need to go back to thinking about broader categories, like people of African descent, recognizing that this allows for more complex discussions of race and identity in the U.S.
- From there we can talk about black ethnics, of which African Americans are a critical and dynamic community.
- I propose this as a roadmap for more nuanced analyses of black ethnics.