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DIALECTS OF THE EASTERN UNITED STATES

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It is undeniable that the United States has its own distinctive way of speaking the English language. Janet Holmgren McKay and Spencer Cosmos outline the three stages of the development of this American dialect. The first stage was from 1600 to 1790. This period encompassed the colonization of America and the Revolutionary War. During these years some very clear regional dialects developed in America. The second stage was from 1790 to 1860 and included the westward expansion and the great influx of African slaves. From 1860 until the present has been a period of great migrations from Europe. It has been the period that saw the rise of American as the standard for English throughout the world (McKay 111). This paper is an exploration of the British colonization of North America during the first period and how those settlement patterns have affected the development of the modern dialects of the eastern United States.

BRITISH SETTLEMENT OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

The first permanent British settlement on the mainland of North America was established in 1607 and named Jamestown in honor of the king of England (Clark 257). The men and women of this colony were only the first of myriad English subjects who would leave their homeland in search of a better life in America. From 1607 until the American Revolutionary War, thousands of English subjects of various social, religious, and political backgrounds from all across the British Isles decided that America offered them a better opportunity than England and emigrated, taking their various lifestyles with them. This mass exodus was not constant, but was instead made up of four great surges. The first was from 1629 until 1640. This wave of immigrants was from East Anglia and settled in the New England area. In the 1650's, the second wave, made up of Royalists from southern England, settled in Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay area. The third great migration originated in the midlands of England and settled in Pennsylvania and the Delaware Bay area of America from 1675 to 1715. The final massive wave of settlement was from the far north of the British Isles from 1713 until the Revolutionary War. These people settled in the Appalachian Highlands. All of these emigrants brought their folkways to the New World and set up lifestyles that were amazingly similar to ones they had had in England.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony received a large population of Puritans from East Anglia in the 1630's. While every county in England, except Westmorland, was represented in the migration, the great majority of set
tlers came from within a 60 mile radius of the market town of Haverhill near the conjunction of Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridge counties (Fischer 30-31). At the time this area was the most urbanized in England. This thickly populated area had long been, as Archbishop William Laud dubbed it, “the throbbing heart of heresy in England.” These people were radicals, both politically and religiously (Fischer 43-44).

They left England for America mainly for religious reasons, but these reasons were resultant, in part, from politics. During the years of this migration, Charles I ruled England without a Parliament and Laud attempted to abolish Puritanism and restore the traditional uniformity of the Church of England (Clark 281). What many of the emigrants offered as their motive for moving was to build a “Bible Commonwealth.” John Winthrop declared a desire that the colony “be as a City upon a Hill,” a model for Europe to reform itself (Savelle 57). While the leaders of the colonization had these grand goals and reasons for emigrating, the majority of the people had more basic concerns. These are evident in a letter written by Lucy Downing to her brother in the New World just before she sailed:

If we see God withdrawing His ordinance from us here and enlarging His presence to you there, I should then hope for comfort in the hazards of the sea with our little ones shrinking about us...in such a case I should [more] willingly venture my children’s bodies and my own for them, than their souls (Fischer 20).

This mother’s sentiment demonstrates how deeply the Puritans felt about what they perceived as the descent of their homeland’s spiritual condition. With their children’s souls in danger these parents saw the perilous ocean crossing as a necessary risk in order to gain the religious haven offered by the opposite shore.

Not only did the emigrants from East Anglia move in family groups, but they also had unusual demographics concerning age, gender, and social status. Of the people who settled Massachusetts Bay, forty percent were over twenty-five, nearly fifty percent were under sixteen, and a few were over sixty. This age distribution was almost parallel to that of England’s population as a whole. The ratio of male to female immigrants, at 3 to 2, was nearly that of a normal population as well. Other than a few exceptions from the aristocracy and the labor class, the population that moved to New England was from the middle class. These people were yeomen, husbandmen, artisans, craftsmen, merchants, and traders (Fischer 26-27). When they moved to Massachusetts they took with them their religious beliefs, their middle class values, and the stability offered by their families. These aspects of their lifestyles were preserved for generations due to their belief “that error was novel and truth was ancient in the world” (Fischer
After the flow of immigrants to New England slowed and their way of life began to settle, the next wave of English settlers hit the shores of Chesapeake Bay.

From 1645 until 1670, somewhere in the range of 40,000 to 50,000 English subjects moved to the Chesapeake, but the majority of these immigrants arrived in the 1650's (Fischer 226). Just as the Yankee migration had encompassed all of England but with a concentration from East Anglia, so had the Virginian migration had its main source. This area was the southwest of England, from Kent to Devon to Warwickshire, from which nearly three quarters of the Chesapeake area settlers came (Fischer 218). Both Virginia's elite and its indentured servants came from the sixteen counties in the southwest of England. Their devotion to the motherland is apparent in the names of the counties in the area that they settled. In both southern Delaware and Maryland all of the county names were drawn from southwest England and in Virginia the majority are from either southwest England or reflect the Royalist views of the settlers (Fischer 239).

The event which set off the great migration to Virginia was the execution of Charles I at the end of the Civil War. After this event the Royalists of southern England fled from the Commonwealth that the Rump Parliament had established when they abolished the monarchy (Clark 303-304). Sir William Berkeley, Governor of Virginia, offered the Cavaliers a new home in America when he declared that Charles II was king in Virginia (Saville 94). Even after Charles II restored the monarchy in 1660, Berkeley continued to attract settlers by appealing to the younger sons of English gentry. He published a pamphlet in 1663 informing them that while little lay ahead of them in England, much could be found in America (Fischer 214). But after the threat of the Commonwealth was eliminated, emigration from the south did decrease.

Not only did the upper class Cavaliers flee the persecution from Parliament under the Commonwealth—many of the lower and middle class fled, too. Parliament had imposed martial law on the southwest counties of England after the Civil War. This severely damaged the wool trade on which the area's economy was based. The depression of the economy and several epidemic diseases succeeded in forcing people of every class out of southwestern England (Fischer 245). In fact, two-thirds of the colonists were unskilled laborers, thirty percent were artisans, and only a small portion were "distressed Cavaliers" (Fischer 228). These people came from an area that was largely rural and supported the manorial system of medieval times. This system was perpetuated by the Virginians and evolved into the classic plantation economy of the South. The emigrants from southern England brought their Anglican beliefs to the New World, as well. They went so far as to pass seventeen laws which required "uniformity throughout this colony, both in substance and circumstance to the canons and constitu-
tions of the Church of England" (Fischer 233). Aside from their religion and social standing, the Virginia colonial population differed greatly from the general population of England. The men outnumbered the women by six to one and the average male was between sixteen and twenty-five years old (Fischer 229-231). It is clear that these immigrants brought many aspects of their lifestyle with them when they moved. In 1724, Hugh Jones wrote, "The habits, life, customs, computations, etc... of the Virginians are much the same as about London, which they esteem their home..." (Fischer 219). While both the New England and the Chesapeake migrations originated near London, the third phase of British migration to America came from far north of England’s great city.

The Friends who made up the third wave of immigrants to British America came from the North Midlands, specifically from the Pennine moors. This was the highest ground in England and very sparsely settled (Fischer 445). The first Quakers came to America in the 1650’s, but these individuals were only the precursors of the great influx to come. In 1675, the first full shipload of Quakers arrived in Delaware and in 1682 more than 2,000 sailed in on 23 ships. Between 1675 and 1715 as many as 23,000 people made the Delaware Valley their home (Fischer 420). They left England in large part due to the Clarendon Code. This was an Act of Uniformity passed to combat Charles II’s Declaration of Indulgence concerning the religious diversity in England. The Code was designed to cut the influence that non-conformist sects had gained in England (Clark 314-315). This resulted in an escalation of the persecution of the various sects, including the Quakers. They suffered acts of physical violence, but after 1675 the oppression was of a different kind. Many of them were jailed and had their property seized. Their reason for emigrating, though, was not to avoid these atrocities, but “to show Quakerism at work, freed from hampering conditions” (Fischer 424). They believed that in the Delaware Valley they could live at peace and their religion would be able to flourish.

The Society of Friends was founded in 1646 by George Fox in England’s north Midlands (Fischer 448). These people believed that Christ had died for all of humanity and espoused an aversion to formal doctrine. This included all the sacraments, ceremonies, clergy, ordinations, and tithes which existed in other Christian religions, especially the Church of England (Fischer 426-427). In the north Midlands of England these people had been farmers and herdsmen who had a strong sense of personal independence and equality. Their dress was uniform—simple homespun suits and dresses of “hodden gray”—and spartan, as were their speech and homes (Fischer 448). The emigrants from this area were generally lower middle-class. The immigration registers kept for Bucks and Philadelphia counties show one man who described himself as a gentleman, the rest were husbandmen, craftsmen, servants, laborers, and a few were yeomen. Some of these people could not afford the passage to America, so their Meetings in England paid it for them. Barbara Janney and her daughter
were given L8.12.2 by the Chester Quarterly Meeting to pay the expenses of the trip to Delaware (Fischer 435-436). Many other ethnic groups were also represented in the Delaware Valley. William Penn had recruited these people to come to Pennsylvania because of their cultural similarities to the Quakers, so there was almost no clash between the groups (Fischer 431). The Friends were open to the involvement of their neighbors, even if they did not formally join the religion. Many people of other denominations attended Quaker services and sent their children to Quaker schools (Fischer 422). This allowed the Quakers a lot of influence over the colony and their way of life became the standard throughout the Delaware Valley.

Though the Quakers were a very tolerant people, there arrived in the valley in 1715 a group of people whom the Quakers disliked: the North British Borderers. Some immigrants from northern Britain had come to America earlier, but the rate increased after Queen Anne's War in 1713. This migration continued until the outbreak of the American Revolution, with more than two-thirds of the over 300,000 immigrants arriving between 1765 and 1775 (Fischer 606). The Borderers moved on past the disdaining Quakers and settled in the backcountry of Appalachia. In the early 1900's Cecil Sharp, an English folklorist, studied the descendants of these immigrants and determined from "their traditional songs, ballads, dances, singing-games, etc...they came from...the north of England or the Border country between Scotland and England." They did come from the English counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire, Northumberland, Durham, and Yorkshire, the Scottish counties of Ayr, Dumfries, Wigtown, Roxburgh and Berwick, and also from northern Ireland (Fischer 621). The reason these people came was simple—they were poor and hungry. In England they faced high rents, low wages, heavy taxes, short leases, and some even famine and starvation (Fischer 610). In order to escape these torments, the Borderers were willing to risk the dangerous crossing, which, due to unscrupulous entrepreneurs, had a death toll which rivaled that of the slave trade (Fischer 612).

The people who did brave the ocean voyage to America generally did so with their families. From 1773 to 1776, sixty-one percent of the people from northern England came with a family group, seventy-three percent of the Scottish Borderers did, also. Northern Ireland contributed a high percentage of families to the Appalachian settlement as well. Both the sex ratio and the ages of the immigrants were similar to those of the Massachusetts Bay settlers, except there were not as many elderly in the backcountry (Fischer 610). These settlers included a few from the ruling class of the Borderlands who had great influence in the New World, but they made up only one or two percent of the total migration. A larger percent were yeomen, but the overwhelming majority were poor farmers, laborers, semiskilled craftsmen, and petty traders (Fischer 613). Among the immigrants were Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and several Protestant sects. This diversity caused many religious conflicts in the
backcountry, with the Presbyterians being the most religiously intolerant (Fischer 615-617). The Borderlands were isolated from the rest of Britain when the emigrants left, and the backcountry of Appalachia was even more so. The people tended to cling to their folkways in Appalachia. A gentleman from the backcountry once said, "Lord, grant that I may always be right, for thou knowest I am hard to turn..." This sentiment was echoed by a woman who wrote "We never let go of a belief once fixed in our minds" (Fischer 650-651). This state of mind helped the backcountry settlers maintain the culture that they had brought with them from the mother country. And, just as in New England, Virginia, and Delaware, the people of Appalachia preserved their religion, their social norms, and their language in the strange new world of America.

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As all of these people settled into their new lives in America, they tried to maintain many of the aspects of their old lives in England. But they were forever separated from their old ways, including their modes of speech, and they began to develop away from the lifeways of England. One way their lives began to change was the leveling of their accents. With influences from other immigrants, among them German, French, Dutch, and the black slaves, and the nominal influence of the Indians native to the area, American English began to develop apart from the English spoken by the original British settlers. This American English leveled many of the unique characteristics of the individual dialects spoken among the settlers, but there still exists four major dialects on the east coast of the United States which are recognizable descendants of the dialects of England. The English spoken by the Yankees in eastern New England is very similar to that spoken in East Anglia. The North Midland dialect of America is reminiscent of the English spoken in the North Midlands of England. In the backcountry of Appalachia the people speak with an echo of the English borderlands in their voices. And the Southerners' drawl is just like their cousins' in southwestern England.

The Yankee twang has spread from the Massachusetts Bay area where it first existed. It is now spoken in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, most of Vermont, and the eastern parts of Massachusetts and Connecticut (Herman 25-26). This dialect is known as Eastern New England and is a descendant of the Norfolk whine spoken by the East Anglians who settled this area. Just as the Norfolk whine can now be heard only in the northern regions of East Anglia, the original Yankee twang is found in the small hill towns of interior New England, though its effect is heard throughout the New England area (Fischer 62).

The pronunciation of Eastern New England has often been described as nasal. It is also non-rhotic, has intrusive [r], and uses a broad a instead of [æ]. The loss of post-vocalic [r] was characteristic of East Anglia and ap-
pears today in the New Englander’s pronunciation of car as [ka] and barn as [ban] (McKay 116). A map in *The Story of English* details the area in England which drop the [r] in the first syllable of farmer, which includes East Anglia (McCrum 97). While these people drop post-vocalic [r]'s, they do pronounce them at the ends of words that have no r. This feature created the pronunciation of Cuba which President Kennedy made famous. The a that New Englanders use in words like class, bath, and dance is [a] instead of the common [æ]. This broad a is evident in poetry from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The poetry’s rhyme scheme demonstrates that glare was pronounced [glar], hair was [har], and air was [ar] (Fischer 59). Another feature of the New England pronunciation is it does not have the [hw] which differentiates between the words Wales and whale in other American dialects (McKay 116).

This dialect also has a distinct vocabulary and some antiquated word constructions. These constructions include housen and blowth for the plurals of house and blossom. These forms were common in the speech of East Anglia when the Puritans left for America (Fischer 58). The vocabulary of New England is a result of the Cambridge-educated ministers who preached every Sunday in the Puritan churches. These men used many Latin terms and their congregation began to coin classic-sounding words to ape the speech of the elite. Rambunctious, absquatulate, splendidious, and many other words ending in ize, -ous, -ulate, -ical, -ction, -acious, -iterous, and —ticate came into English from the imaginations of the New Englanders (Fischer 61). The overwhelming similarities that Eastern New England shows to East Anglian are evident at Plymouth Plantation. This 1627-style village has people to play the parts of Puritan settlers in New England. Len Travers, who has played Miles Standish, explained

Some people pick up their dialects rather quickly. Some of them have a natural advantage. For instance, if a New Englander is going to play an East Anglian they have a natural advantage, and find the dialect easier to pick up. Whereas if they must portray someone from “Zummerzet” they find that a bit more difficult to do because they must now pronounce their r's which they never have done before (McCrum 99-100).

This ease is due to the fact that, even though it has changed, Eastern New England is more similar to its predecessor, East Anglian, than it is to the dialect of Somerset.

Today, from the Delaware Valley, through Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and out to the west, the dialect spoken is North Midland. This is the area that the Quakers settled when they spread out from the Delaware (Fischer 470). American North Midland is a development of British North Midland, with some influences from German, French, Dutch, and the Indian lan-
guages native to the area. Because the Quakers were more tolerant of "for-
eigners" than their British neighbors, many Indian place names exist in
Pennsylvania and some Indian words entered the dialect (Fischer 474).
This is in keeping with the diversity of the sources for British North Mid-
land. This speech itself was a mixture of the British and Scandinavian
languages, so it is unsurprising that its speakers continued to borrow from
other languages when they came to America (Fischer 470).

American North Midland pronunciation is distinguishable mainly by its
vowels, but a few consonants are outstanding, also. It is universally rhotic,
and without the intrusive [r] of Eastern New England. Whereas in New
England, only the pronunciation [grisi] is found for greasey, in North Mid-
land [grizi] is also heard, though as not often as [grisi] (Atwood 166).
Speakers of this dialect differentiate between tot and taught by the vowels
[a] and [o] respectively. It is also common for them to make the distinction
between horse [hors], and hoarse, [hors]. But in the words carry and
marry, the same [ɛ] is used.

When the Quakers emigrated to Delaware, they brought not only their
distinctive pronunciation, but also their vocabulary and verb construction.
In the north Midlands of England, the common construction of the nega-
tive of to be in first person singular was I'm not. This conjugation, along
with he grew for the third person singular past tense of to grow, can be
heard throughout the American North Midlands today. So can many of the
words and expressions that were unique to England's north Midlands.
Among these are abide, all out, apple-pie order, blather, brat, cattails,
daddy long legs, dresser, and dumb-founded, all of which can still be found
in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire (Fischer 471-472).
While the people of Pennsylvania no longer speak "a broad Yorkshire dia-
lect" as they did in the eighteenth century, the two North Midland dialects
still show enough similarity that they can be identified as relatives.

When the North Borderers moved on through the Quaker settlements
in the Delaware Valley, they ended up in the Great Smoky Mountains of
Tennessee, and North Carolina, the Cumberlands of Tennessee and Ken-
tucky, the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and West Virginia, and some
even moved further west to settle in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and
Missouri. But these areas are not the only ones where their dialect is
heard. Traces of the South Midland dialect can be found in Fort Worth,
Dallas, Eastern Oklahoma, the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia peninsula,
and in some areas of the Piedmont (Herman 148). Since this dialect came
from the speech of the Scots, Irish, and northern English, it was first called
"Scotch-Irish" speech. But as it slowly became the dominant speech pat-
tern of Appalachia, it was identified as the dialect of the region, not only
one ethnic group (Fischer 652).
The pronunciation of the Appalachian dialect is rhotic, has the intrusive \( r \), and several variations from the vowels of the other American dialects. This dialect combines the features of North Midland and Eastern New England when it comes to \( r \). While Appalachian pronounces its post-vocalic \( r \)’s, like North Midland, it also adds them on at the ends of words, like New England’s Cubar. It also says \( [a:] \) instead of \( [\alpha 1] \). This gives words like hired and wire the sounds \( [\text{hir}d] \) and \( [\text{wa}r] \). Appalachian also monophthongizes \( [\alpha 1] \) to \( [\alpha] \), which results in \( [b\alpha] \) instead of \( [b\alpha 1] \). Usually, these speakers say the \( [\alpha e] \) in bath and path, but sometimes they diphthongize it to \( [\alpha e\alpha] \). In terms of the \( [\text{grisi}] \) versus \( [\text{grizi}] \), South Midlanders say \( [\text{grizi}] \), but sometimes they change the final vowel to \( [l] \). Cratis Williams has described his speech this way:

No one says hair the way we do. That’s because of the strong influence of the \( r \)... Instead of saying hair or hayre as other Americans do, we say harr... We continue to omit the \( g \). Strictly speaking, we don’t omit it, we never did get around to putting it on. And we continue to use the Middle English a- in front of ing words. So we go a-huntin’ and a-fishin’... (McCrum 145).

These features are similar to those of the speech of the north borderlands of England, as is the vocabulary of the Appalachians.

South Midland has many peculiar vocabulary words. Among them are forrenst (next to), skift (dusting of snow), cute, hant (ghost), bumphuzled (confused), and scoot (to slide). All of these words came directly from the borderlands of England. A vocabulary list collected in Cumberland and Westmorland during the nineteenth century includes all of these words (Fischer 653-654). The vocabulary of Appalachian also shows many influences from the Gaelic of Scotland and Ireland. For example, bonny-clabber, which means curdled sour milk in this American dialect, came from the Irish Gaelic bainne clabair. The you-all of this region is also from the Irish. This usage is alive and well in Ulster (McCrum 145). All of these features have been preserved in today’s South Midland dialect from the original dialect of the settlers from the English borderlands.

Before the American Revolution, a Pennsylvania lady wrote about a man from Maryland “who has the softest voice, never pronounces the \( R \) at all...” (Fischer 256). The dialect that gentleman spoke is called Southern and can be found, not only in Maryland, but also in the lowland areas of West Virginia, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Texas, and the southern parts of Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana (Herman 61). This variation of American English has developed from the speech patterns of the emigrants from southwest England who first settled the Chesapeake Bay area.
The Southern dialect is described as "a soft, slow, melodious drawl that came not from the nose but the throat" (Fischer 258). What makes it soft is the absence of most r's and the elongation of many vowels. Southern speakers diphthongize short words. For example, they say [rɛə k] for wreck and [lɪd] for lid. They also monophthongize vowels, like [a] to [ɑː] and [ɔː] to [ʌ]. Another example of elongation is the use of [juː] in words such as tune and dew. With its wide variety of vowels, Southern distinguishes between the words marry, merry, and Mary, and also between horse and hoarse. In the south, as in Appalachia, the people say [grizi] instead of [grisi]. Many of these speech patterns were existent in southwestern England even after the emigrants had left for America. A visitor from the United States in the nineteenth century, who was surprised by the similarity the Sussex dialect showed to American Southern, wrote of one Sussexman "but for his misplaced h's—and he dropped them all over the road in a most reckless and amazing manner—he might have been a Southern or Western American" (Fischer 261). This similarity was not only apparent in the pronunciation, but also in the vocabulary of the dialects.

Some peculiarities of the Southern vocabulary are howdy, shook, chomp, botch, and laid off. These words had been part of polite speech in England when the emigrants left, but by the eighteenth century they were out of style, though they continued in polite usage in the American South (Fischer 257). The word stock, as well as the accent, of Southern is a hybrid of the dialects of southwestern England, though not all of the features of these dialects were preserved in America. For example, the dropped h of Sussex and the hard s of Somerset did not last in the Chesapeake area. But the Ah be for I am used in the south is still found all over southwest England (Fischer 263). These correlations between American Southern and the southwestern dialects of England allow the relationship between them to be clearly seen.

When the settlement patterns of the British colonists are compared with the existing dialects in the eastern United States, a striking correlation is found. Each of the four major dialects came from a specific area in England, brought over when some of the speakers of that dialect decided America was a better place for them than England. Each person came for their own reasons, some were only children who had to go with their parents, some were escaping religious persecution, and some were trying to save themselves and their families from starvation. But they all came, and they brought with them a distinct culture, religion, and language, the effects of which can still be seen in America.
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