

Alabama 12

Orthographic transcription:

Well, growing up in Birmingham, I was often picked on a lot because of the way that I spoke. Several of my peers would say that “uh James, you sound white, or you know you speak too proper, why you don’t use slang or anything? and that always bothered me and I was like, what is sounding black? Um.... My mom always taught me to speak proper English and that’s what I did. I think a good portion of it is that I worked to kind of get rid of my regionalism, cuz I kinda knew that I would like to be either an actor or be in news. You know you really don’t, you shouldn’t have a southern drawl when you speak so I just had to, I tried my best to get rid of it. I guess that’s one of the contributing factors to why I speak this way. I guess now in college, people commend me on it so I don’t get picked on about it any more. So that’s just.....

The subject was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama and has spent all of his life in the state. He was educated in predominantly black schools. Apparently his mother directed him to “speak properly” and discouraged him from speaking slang. He is majoring in broadcast journalism and has been involved in theatre in undergraduate school and thinks this may have had an impact on his speech as well.

The subject’s speech, particularly in his extemporaneous speaking, is characterized by very relaxed consonant action, particularly with regard to plosive release in the final position. So you’ll hear “thasss whad I did” or “almos” for “almost.” Linkage is also very relaxed; one word just slides into another. There is a softening of the diphthong on [aɪ] to produce [mɑ̃ [instead of [ma] and the occasional i/e substitution as in [sɪnimɪntəl] for sentimental.

Contributed by Daydrie Hague, December 12, 2007. Running time: 02:57