



Do You Speak American?

Robert Macneil, William Cran

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Is American English in decline? Are regional dialects dying out? Is there a difference between men and women in how they adapt to linguistic variations?

These questions, and more, about our language catapulted Robert MacNeil and William Cran—the authors (with Robert McCrum) of the language classic *The Story of English*—across the country in search of the answers. *Do You Speak American?* is the tale of their discoveries, which provocatively show how the standard for American English—if a standard exists—is changing quickly and dramatically.

On a journey that takes them from the Northeast, through Appalachia and the Deep South, and west to California, the authors observe everyday verbal interactions and in a host of interviews with native speakers glean the linguistic quirks and traditions characteristic of each area. While examining the histories and controversies surrounding both written and spoken American English, they address anxieties and assumptions that, when explored, are highly emotional, such as the growing influence of Spanish as a threat to American English and the special treatment of African-American vernacular English. And, challenging the purists who think grammatical standards are in serious deterioration and that media saturation of our culture is homogenizing our speech, they surprise us with unpredictable responses.

With insight and wit, MacNeil and Cran bring us a compelling book that is at once a celebration and a potent study of our singular language.

Each wave of immigration has brought new words to enrich the American language. Do you recognize the origin of

1. blunderbuss, sleigh, stoop, coleslaw, boss, waffle?

Or

2. dumb, ouch, shyster, check, kaput, scram, bummer?

Or

3. phooey, pastrami, glitch, kibbitz, schnozzle?

Or

4. broccoli, espresso, pizza, pasta, macaroni, radio?

Or

5. smithereens, lollapalooza, speakeasy, hooligan?

Or

6. vamoose, chaps, stampede, mustang, ranch, corral?

1. Dutch 2. German 3. Yiddish 4. Italian 5. Irish 6. Spanish

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