

The Southeastern Conference on Linguistics (SECOL 89) presents:

**MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND
THE LANGUAGE OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS:
A PERSONAL ACCOUNT**

PLENARY ADDRESS



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Open to all

Hosted virtually by
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In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois famously articulated the experience of double consciousness as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others... two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings”. Over a century later, this experience still resonates with many African Americans, and perhaps especially many middle-class African Americans, who find themselves having to navigate multiple, and sometimes conflicting, norms and identities, given their more central positioning along the socioeconomic and sociocultural spectrum of American society. In this paper, I offer an autoethnographic account of my experience as a middle class, middle-aged, African American female from the southern U.S., who is a native speaker of AAE and a linguist. Using recordings of myself in a variety of settings, I explore the range of features that I employ along the standard-vernacular continuum and provide an analytic perspective that is, at once, both inductive and deductive in its approach. I also offer a glimpse into a segment of the African American speech community that has been underrepresented in sociolinguistic research and make the case for why linguists must continue to extend definitions of the African American speech community beyond the working classes.

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