

# The Linguistic Construction of Race and Place in Rochester, New York

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## Undergraduate Distinguished Speaker: Sharese King, University of Chicago

Recent explorations of regional variation across African American speech communities have brought to the forefront the linguistic heterogeneity across African American English (AAE). As sociolinguists have problematized the presentation of AAE as a *uniform* variety, intra-group analyses highlight the diverse social and linguistic constructions among African American speakers. In this talk, I zoom in on three personae local to the African American community in Rochester, New York, assessing how each style is linguistically constructed. I investigate how the three personae, The Mobile Professional, The Hood Kid, and The Biker recruit or reject vocalic patterns of the Northern Cities Shift, as well as AA(V)E morphosyntactic patterns in the construction of their identities. The findings challenge how we define the dialect, while also complicating our understanding of the relationship between race and language.

## Bio

Sharese King is a Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Chicago, and starting Fall 2020, a Neubauer Family Assistant Professor in Linguistics at U Chicago. Her work explores connections between language, race, and place, primarily concerning the ways the speech of African Americans is constructed, radicalized, and evaluated by listeners. Her work has appeared in the journals *Language* and *The Annual Review in Linguistics*, and she has appeared in the documentary *Talking Black in America*. Her work with John Rickford— exploring how the speech of Racheal Jeantel affected the outcome of the Trayvon Martin case— was awarded the Best Paper in *Language* in 2016, and has been reprinted in *The Best of Language: Volume III*. Her current project explores how African-Americans in Rochester, New York heterogeneously articulate their identities in response to sociohistorical dynamics local to the city, calling into question singular and monolithic conceptions of African-American Language.