

IF YOU AIN'T SOUTHERN, YOU CAN'T FAKE IT

Admittedly, this doesn't rise to the level of many of the burning issues that confront us daily, but I must tell you that it fries my hide to hear outsiders trying to talk Southern. Friends, if you ain't Southern, you can't fake it. I was reminded of that unalterable fact the other night while watching "In the Heat of the Night" on television. It pained me greatly to see the late Carroll O'Connor pretending to sound like a small town sheriff in the South. O'Connor was born in the Bronx and was much more believable as Archie Bunker calling Rob Reiner "Meathead" than trying to say, "Dang it, boy. If yore brains wuz dynamite, you couldn't blow yore nose."

You can't fake the Southern drawl. It is something you are born with and those of us who have it should be exceedingly proud. Remember, it is not we who talk funny, it is everybody else. I have done an in-depth study on the subject and have discovered that there are three other distinct dialects in the country. There is the New York dialect, where everyone talks in a hurry because they want to get off the streets before they are mugged. New Yorkers say things like "Watchwhereth**%#@#yurgoin," meaning, "Excuse me, but you stepped in front of me," and "fuggedabowitit", which translates as, "Thank you, but I must respectfully decline."

Then there is California. In California, they use the word "like" a lot, as in "I am, like, going to the beach and, like, do something trendy, like roller blade on my surfboard and then, like, eat sushi and, like, get in touch with my inner self, dude."

Finally, we have the region that lies roughly between New York and California, above the Mason-Dixon Line and below Canada, known as The Rest of the Country. This area is characterized by a speech pattern known as Blah. Everybody in Minnesota sounds like everybody in Nebraska who sounds like everybody in Illinois who sounds like everybody in Utah who sounds like blah, blah, blah.

Sure, we Southerners have our own unique dialect, but we use the same words as everyone else. We just assign them different meanings. When others talk about "war", they have visions of bombs bursting in air. When we say "war", we are describing what goes around fence posts to keep the cows from running loose. Webster's Dictionary defines "moan" as "to utter a low dull sound." Not here. When we say "moan," we mean to get the lead out and move it. ("Moan, Clarence, we ain't got all danged day.")

If you are from Wyoming, a "ranch" is a large expanse of land. We have ranches in the South, too, only we have more of them. We have pipe ranches and box-end ranches and socket ranches. We use our ranches to fix any number of things, like water pipes and lawn mowers and pickup trucks.

Speaking of "fixing", that is one of our favorite words in the South. We use it like everyone else when we are going to repair something, as in "Darlin', whar's my ranch? I'm gonna fix yore pickup truck." However, we also use fix as a substitute for "preparation", which has too many "r's" and takes too long to say. We "fix" dinner and then announce to the family to wash up, that we re "fixin' to eat." One thing you will never hear a native Southerner say, however, is "Let's hurry up and eat 'cause I'm fixin' to go to watch 'em play ice hockey."

If people want to tease us about our speech, who cares? At least we don't live where it snows ten months a year and we don't eat raw fish and say "like" all the time.

As I said, this isn't one of the burning issues of the day, but I just felt compelled to remind you to take pride in the way you speak. Let the Hollywood types try to imitate our drawl and the Yankee transplants say they can become one of us. Both will fail. If you ain't Southern, you can't fake it. Thank the Lord.