

Gene Valentino

The DECLINE of SPEECH – in America
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As a nation of immigrants, America's speech has reflected our advance and decline. The foremost indicator is our media, which resonates how we sound. Simply said, poor speech and diction have become common on much of TV, cable and radio – while many music-videos are in the gutter. Glaring and apparent are obscene gestures like Michael Jackson's and others grabbing their groin. The lyrics of most rap and rock music are more blatant and explicitly-profane. Producers say this is what the public wants and supports. This moot point avoids the fact: profanity and poor speech have become our vernacular. America does not sound good.

Since the 'roaring 20s' when motion-pictures started 'talking'; through the 60s when housing and babies were booming; speech kept pace with radio's growth. Well-spoken announcers with good voices were a benchmark for immigrants after WW1, and a hallmark for their children who became veterans of WW2. Radio, and later TV, were part of the 'learning experience' replete with eloquent voices and perfect diction. Hugh James, Jimmy Wallington and Harry Von Zell were just a few of the big names. Network radio announcers had star-status and even wore tuxedos in those early years. The best-sounding voices articulated flawless speech – while listeners emulated the network criteria. A pervasive learning process prevailed in America. Some colloquial jargons and regional accents were minimized as a unified culture ensued. Radio, and later TV, set the standard for speech. America listened and learned – while a nation of diverse backgrounds were better assimilating.

Our level of education took a giant-step forward in the late 40s when the Veterans' Bill of Rights put many GIs in college. Their children would follow in the decades ahead. The bellwether of our culture was broadcasting and the print media. On radio and TV, music, news and varied productions based on classics of literature proliferated, many becoming award-winners. Victorious in war, America also was the world-leader - with economy and culture soaring to new heights. In retrospect, the early 70s was when we peaked. We've gone downhill since. It was difficult to see then - the decline of culture is more vivid in retrospect. Yet, it happened.

The turbulent years that followed the 60s should not have mitigated the course of culture – which had no connection with the war in Viet Nam or the race-problems at home. But with the unrest, foul language became acceptable and our standard of speech degenerated. The proliferation of public profanity ran rampant and simply took over. It's now evident everywhere, especially with pop-music performers and some media. As to 'poor speech', perhaps a saving grace is the increasing number of British-accented news-people on American TV and cable. Sadly, few Americans are on Britain's media, across-the-pond.

A black President and First Lady are now in the White House. With law degrees they personify higher education in America – a standard of excellence in culture,

**character and deportment. They're well-spoken, and sailed in on a wave of change.
Can they turn-the-tide of decline? Gene Valentino # # #**