



# **Ain'thology: the History and Life of a Taboo Word**

*Patricia Donaher*

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The word ain't is used by speakers of all dialects and sociolects of English. Nonetheless, language critics view ain't as marking speakers as "lazy" or "stupid"; and the educated assume ain't is on its deathbed, used only in clichés. Everyone has an opinion about ain't. Even the grammar-checker in Microsoft Word flags every ain't with a red underscore. But why? Over the past 100 years, only a few articles and sections of books have reviewed the history of ain't or discussed it in dialect contexts. This first book-length collection specifically dedicated to this shibboleth provides a multifaceted analysis of ain't in the history and grammar of English; in English speech, writing, television, comics and other media; and in relation to the minds, attitudes, and usage of speakers and writers of English from a range of regions, ethnicities, social classes, and dialect communities. Most articles in the collection are accessible for the average educated speaker, while others are directed primarily at specialists in linguistic study-but with helpful explanations and footnotes to make these articles more approachable for the layperson. This collection of articles on ain't thus provides a broad audience with a rich understanding and appreciation of the history and life of this taboo word.

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