

COUNTERING CONTRAST:  
DIALECT IN CONTEMPORARY  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
LITERATURE



# Outline



- Definition and (brief) historical background
- General argument
- Synopsis of three chapters
- Presentation of Chapter 2
- Conclusion
- Questions

# What do I mean by “dialect”?

- African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
- Walt Wolfram and Erik R. Thomas (2002)
  - ▣ Enclave dialect communities
  - ▣ Dialect is separate and derivative
  - ▣ Separateness perpetuates generally negative considerations

# Example of AAVE vs Standard English

Dear Celie,

I wrote a letter to you almost every day on the ship coming to Africa. But, by the time we docked I was so down, I tore them into little pieces and dropped them into the water. Albert is not going to let you have my letters so what use is there in writing them. That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to you on the waves.

Dear God,

What with being shock, crying and blowing my nose, and trying to puzzle out what words us don't know, it took a long time to read just the first two or three letters. By the time we got to where she good and settled in Africa, Mr. \_\_\_\_ and Grady come home.

# Historical context

- AAVE appears in slave narratives
  - ▣ Is then adopted by white authors
  - ▣ Unvarying plantation contexts
- Lisa Minnick (2004) “specter of stereotype in the minds of white readers”
- Ted Lardner and Arnetha Ball (2005) point out negative academic impact



# CHAPTER 1

## CULTURAL REPERCUSSIONS

A Study of the Use of Dialect in *Kindred*

# KINDRED

a novel





# CHAPTER 2

## ALIENATION AND RELIEF

Analyses of Language in *The Color Purple*



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FILM

# The Color Purple

also known as Purple: A Woman's Story

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# CHAPTER 3

## UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH

The Plural and Converging Voices of *Beloved*




IN  
LITERATURE


The image shows the front cover of the book 'BeLoved' by Toni Morrison. The cover features a close-up photograph of a person's bare, cracked, and scarred back, set against a vibrant red background. The title 'BELOVED' is printed in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters across the lower half of the cover. In the top right corner, there is a circular gold-colored sticker with the text 'IN LITERATURE'. At the top left, there are two horizontal bars, one orange and one light blue. The author's name 'TONI MORRISON' is partially visible at the top of the cover.

# BELOVED





“I *embroder* Olivia in the seat of all her daidies. I *embrody* lot of little stars and flowers too” (Walker 13; my emphasis).



“I think about ground glass, wonder how you grind it. But I don’t feel mad at all. Just interest” (Walker 54).

# Conclusion (the point?)

- Dialect can inform the standard
- Real life vs. literature
  - ▣ Literature provides the space for this interaction
  - ▣ This essay attempts to illuminate and analyze this space
- Important to consider the role of dialect in all societal contexts, especially academic



# Works cited in presentation

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# QUESTIONS

Thanks for listening!

