

**University of Toronto Mississauga  
Department of Language Studies**

**invites you to a lecture in linguistics:**

**Exploring Earlier African American English:  
Diversity and Identity in 19th-Century Letters**

**Gerard Van Herk  
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

**Friday, November 16, 2012  
2 p.m.  
IB 377**

The social and legal forces at play in 19th-century America have left us little access to the writings of everyday African Americans during the slavery era. Using a little-known data source – letters from semi-literate settlers in Liberia – this paper investigates the language of non-elite African Americans.

First, a quantitative approach reveals dialect differences based on region and degree of interaction with whites. Then, a qualitative look at ethnic self-naming (colored, African, Sons of Ham) investigates how those same writers built a sense of African American nationhood, decades before better-known nationalist movements.



**Gerard Van Herk**  
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His research interests  
include creoles, African  
American English,  
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He is the author of  
*What is Sociolinguistics?*  
(Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).