As part of the New Deal program during the Great Depression, the Federal Writers’ Project was launched by the federal government’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) to provide jobs for unemployed writers. One of the subprojects within the Federal Writer’s project was the Southern Life Histories Project (SLHP), an effort led by W.T. Couch with the intention of faithfully representing southern society. This collection encompasses documented “life histories” of about 1,200 individuals across the South, written by about 60 project members.

Our data reveals that written dialect was used more frequently in the histories of black interviewees without formal education as compared to white interviewees without formal education. This disparity is likely the result of racialized thinking and prejudices of the writers during this time period.