

**THE DEPICTION OF THE LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE NOVEL OF COLOR****PURPLE BY ALICE WALKER**

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**Abstract**

The novel of *The Color Purple* is a powerful cultural touchstone of modern American literature, that depicts the lives of African American women in early twentieth-century rural Georgia. This article is intended to give the main plot of the novel that is related to two teenage girls, sisters Celie and Nettie sustain their loyalty to and hope in each other across time, distance and silence. Through a series of letters spanning twenty years, first from Celie to God, then the sisters to each other despite the unknown, the novel draws readers into its rich and exposition of Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery and Sofia and their experience.

**Key words:** Social issues, violence, memorable portrayals of Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery and Sofia.

*The Color Purple* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983, making Walker the first black woman to win the prize. Walker also won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1983. Mel Watkins of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote that it is a "striking and consummately well-written novel", praising its powerful emotional impact and epistolary structure. It was also named a PBS Great American Read Top 100 Pick. *The Color Purple* broke the silence around domestic and sexual abuse, narrating the lives of women through their pain and struggle, companionship and growth, resilience and bravery. Deeply compassionate and beautifully and attractively imagined, Alice Walker's epic carries readers on a spirit-affirming journey to redemption and love. Though the novel has garnered critical acclaim, it has also been the subject of controversy. The American Library Association placed it on the list of top hundred banned and challenged books in the United States from 1990 to 1999, 2000 to 2009, and 2010 to 2019, as well as the top ten list for 2007 and 2009. Commonly cited justifications for banning the book include sexual explicitness, explicit language, violence, and homosexuality.

The book received greater scrutiny amidst controversy surrounding the release of the film adaptation in 1985. The controversy centered around the depiction of black men, which some critics saw as feeding stereotypical narratives of black male violence, while others found the representation compelling and relatable.

*The Color Purple* has a powerful plot that focus on love, family, identity, surviving trauma and abuse, and many other social issues. It is a story that delights as much as it horrifies. Celie, the protagonist and narrator of *The Color Purple*, is a poor, uneducated, fourteen-year-old black girl living in rural Georgia. Celie starts writing letters to God because her father, Alphonso, beats and rapes her. Alphonso has already impregnated Celie once. Celie is a young poor, uneducated 14-year-old African-American teenager girl living in the Southern United States in the early 1900s. She writes letters to God because her father, Alphonso, beats and rapes her. Alphonso has already impregnated Celie once, which resulted in the birth of a girl, Olivia, whom Alphonso abducted. Celie believes that Alphonso killed Olivia. Celie then has a second child, and Celie's ailing mother dies after cursing Celie on her deathbed. The second child is a boy named Adam, whom Alphonso takes from Celie shortly after his birth.

Celie and her younger sister, 12-year-old Nettie, learn that a man introduced only as "Mister" wants to marry Nettie. Alphonso refuses to let Nettie marry, instead arranging for Mister to marry Celie. Mister,

a widower, needing somebody to care for his own two children and keep his own house clean, eventually accepts the offer. Mister physically, sexually, and verbally abuses Celie, and his two children mistreat her as well. Shortly thereafter, Nettie runs away from Alphonso and takes refuge at Celie's house, where Mister makes sexual advances toward her. Celie then advises Nettie to seek assistance from a well-dressed black woman whom she saw in the general store a while back; unbeknownst to Celie, the woman adopted Olivia, and she is the only black woman Celie has ever seen with money of her own. Nettie is forced to leave after promising to write. Celie, however, never receives any letters and concludes that her sister Nettie is dead.

Time passes, and Harpo, Mister's son, falls in love with an assertive girl named Sofia, who becomes pregnant with Harpo's baby and, despite initial resistance from Mister, marries Harpo. Harpo and Sofia have five more children in short order. Celie is amazed by Sofia's defiant refusal to submit to Harpo's attempts to control her. As Harpo is kinder and gentler than his father, Celie advises him not to dominate Sofia. Harpo temporarily follows Celie's advice but falls back under Mister's sway. Celie, momentarily envious of Harpo's genuine love of Sofia, then advises Harpo to beat her. Sofia fights back, however, and confronts Celie. A guilty Celie apologizes and confides in Sofia about all the abuse she suffers at Mister's hands. She also begins to consider Sofia's advice about defending herself against further abuse from Mister. Shug Avery, a jazz and blues singer and Mister's long-time mistress, falls ill, and Mister takes her in. Celie, who has been fascinated by photos of Shug that she found in Mister's belongings, is thrilled to have her there. Mister's father expresses disapproval of the arrangement, reminding Mister that Shug has three out-of-wedlock children, though Mister implies to him that he is those children's father, upon which Mister's father leaves in disgust. While Shug is initially rude to Celie, who has taken charge of nursing her, the two become friends, and Celie soon finds herself infatuated with Shug. Frustrated by Harpo's domineering behavior, Sofia moves out, taking her children with her. Several months later, Harpo opens a juke joint where a fully recovered Shug performs nightly. Shug decides to stay when she learns that Mister beats Celie when she is away. Shug and Celie grow closer.

Sofia returns for a visit and promptly gets into a fight with Harpo's new girlfriend, Squeak, knocking Squeak's teeth out. In town one day, while Sofia is enjoying a day out with her new boyfriend, a prizefighter, and their respective children, she gets into a physical altercation with the mayor after his wife, Miss Millie, insults Sofia and her children. The police arrive and brutally beat Sofia, leaving her with a cracked skull, broken ribs, her face rendered nearly unrecognizable, and blind in one eye. She is subsequently sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Squeak, mixed-race and Sheriff Hodges' illegitimate niece, attempts to blackmail the sheriff into releasing Sofia, resulting in her being raped by her uncle. Squeak cares for Sofia's children while she is incarcerated, and the two women develop a friendship. Sofia is eventually released and begins working for Miss Millie, which she detests. Despite being newly married to a man called Grady, Shug instigates a sexual relationship with Celie on her next visit. One night Shug asks Celie about her sister, and Shug helps Celie recover letters from Nettie that Mister has been hiding from her for decades. The letters indicate that Nettie befriended a missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine, the well-dressed woman Celie saw in the store. Nettie eventually accompanied them to Africa to do missionary work, Samuel and Corrine having unwittingly adopted both Adam and Olivia. Corrine, noticing her adopted children resemble Nettie, wonders if Samuel fathered the children with Nettie. Increasingly suspicious, Corrine tries to limit Nettie's role in her family.

Through her letters, Nettie reveals she has become disillusioned with her missionary work. Corrine became ill with a fever, and Nettie asked Samuel to tell her how he adopted Olivia and Adam. Realizing Adam and Olivia are Celie's children, Nettie then learned Alphonso is actually her and Celie's stepfather. Their actual father was a store owner that white men lynched because they resented his success. She also learned their mother suffered a mental collapse after her husband's death and that Alphonso exploited the situation to control their mother's considerable wealth. Nettie confesses to Samuel and Corrine she is the children's biological aunt. The gravely ill Corrine refuses to believe her until Nettie reminds her of her previous encounter with Celie in the store. Later, Corrine dies, finally having accepted Nettie's story. Meanwhile, Celie visits Alphonso, who confirms Nettie's story. Celie begins to lose some of her faith in God, which she confides to Shug, who explains to Celie her own unique religious philosophy. Shug helps Celie realize that God is not someone who has power over her like the rest of the men in Celie's life. Rather, God is an "it" and not a "who."

Having had enough of her husband's abuse, Celie decides to leave Mister along with Shug and Squeak, who is considering a singing career of her own. Celie puts a curse on Mister before leaving him for good, settling in Tennessee and supporting herself as a seamstress. Alphonso dies, Celie inherits his land, and moves back into her childhood home. Around this time, Shug falls in love with Germaine, a member of her band, and this news crushes Celie. Shug travels with Germaine, all the while writing postcards to Celie. Celie pledges to love Shug even if Shug does not love her back. Celie learns that Mister, suffering from a considerable decline in fortunes after Celie left him, has changed dramatically, and Celie begins to call him by his first name, Albert. Albert proposes that they marry "in the spirit as well as in the flesh," but Celie declines.

Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel marry and prepare to return to America. Before they leave, Adam marries Tashi, an African girl. Following an African tradition, Tashi undergoes the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring. In solidarity, Adam undergoes the same facial scarring ritual. As Celie realizes that she is content in her life without Shug, Shug returns, having ended her relationship with Germaine. Nettie, Samuel, Olivia, Adam, and Tashi all arrive at Celie's house. Nettie and Celie reunite after 30 years and introduce one another to their respective families.

In conclusion, *The Color Purple* is a 1982 epistolary novel by American author Alice Walker which won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction. It was later adapted into a film and musical of the same name. The novel has been the popular and frequent ambition of censors and appears on the American Library Association list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 2000–2010 at number seventeen because of the sometimes explicit content, particularly in terms of violence. In 2003, the book was listed on the BBC's *The Big Read* poll of the UK's "best-loved novels."

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