



Postslavery Literature in the Americas : Family Portraits in Black and White

George B. Handley

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Since its demise in the nineteenth century, slavery has given rise to an outpouring of literatures that reflect the diversity of its hemispheric legacy, but the discipline of literary studies has been reluctant to admit commonalities among former slave societies in the New World. Examining major novels from the 1880s to the 1970s, George B. Handley shows how fiction from different nations shares what he calls textual simultaneity in revealing parallel narrative anxieties about genealogy, narrative authority, and racial difference.

In comparing these novels, Handley demonstrates the ways in which, ironically, U.S. culture tried to shed its own miscegenated Caribbean image of itself during the time of its greatest expansion into the Caribbean. He argues that imperialism was a means by which the United States could pretend to its own whiteness and civilization by creating a new extranational miscegenation. At the same time, the United States' encroachment in the Caribbean created an environment in which the islands' cultures called upon divergent discourses on the legacies of slavery to retain a sense of autonomy.

By offering a critique of current postslavery literary criticism in the Americas as well as exemplary comparative readings of novels by important postslavery writers?including William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Alejo Carpentier, Jean Rhys, Charles Chesnutt, Cirilo Villaverde, Rosario Ferré, and others?Handley seeks to address the major questions raised by this abundance of postslavery literature and finds meaningful correspondences that begin to show the outlines of a larger tradition of postslavery literature in the Americas.

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