



Dividing Lines: Class Anxiety and Postbellum Black Fiction (Class : Culture)

Andréa N. Williams

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One of the most extensive studies of class in 19th-century African American literature to date, *Dividing Lines* unveils how black fiction writers represented the uneasy relationship between class differences, racial solidarity, and the quest for civil rights in black communities. By portraying complex, highly stratified communities with a growing black middle class, these authors dispelled notions that black Americans were uniformly poor or uncivilized. The book argues that the signs of class anxiety are embedded in postbellum fiction: from the verbal stammer or prim speech of class-conscious characters to fissures in the fiction's form.

Andréa N. Williams delves into the familiar and lesser-known works of Frances E. W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Charles W. Chesnutt, Sutton Griggs, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, showing how these texts mediate class through discussions of labor, moral respectability, ancestry, spatial boundaries, and skin complexion. *Dividing Lines* also draws on reader responses—from book reviews, editorials, and letters—to show how the class anxiety expressed in African American fiction directly sparked reader concerns over the status of black Americans in the U.S. social order. Weaving literary history with compelling textual analyses, this study yields new insights about the intersection of race and class in black novels and short stories from the 1880s to 1900s.

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