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Afro-Realisms and the Romances of Race

Rethinking Blackness in the African American Novel

MELISSA DANIELS-RAUTERKUS

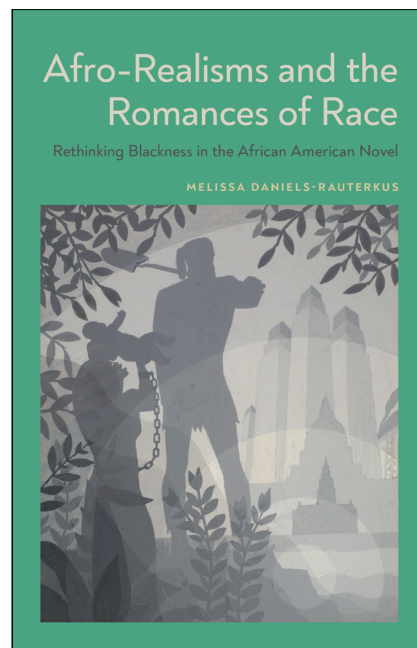
From the 1880s to the early 1900s, a particularly turbulent period of U.S. race relations, the African American novel provided a powerful counternarrative to dominant and pejorative ideas about blackness. In *Afro-Realisms and the Romances of Race*, Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus uncovers how black and white writers experimented with innovative narrative strategies to revise static and stereotypical views of black identity and experience.

With this provocative and challenging book, Daniels-Rauterkus contests the long-standing idea that African Americans did not write literary realism, along with the inverse misconception that white writers did not make important contributions to African American literature. Taking up key works by Charles W. Chesnutt, Frances E. W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain, Daniels-Rauterkus argues that authors blended realism with romance, often merging mimetic and melodramatic conventions to advocate on behalf of African Americans, challenge popular theories of racial identity, disrupt the expectations of the literary marketplace, and widen the possibilities for black representation in fiction.

Combining literary history with close textual analysis, Daniels-Rauterkus reads black and white writers alongside each other to demonstrate the reciprocal nature of literary production. Moving beyond discourses of racial authenticity and cultural property, Daniels-Rauterkus stresses the need to organize African American literature around black writers and their meditations on blackness, but she also proposes leaving space for nonblack writers whose use of comparable narrative strategies can facilitate reconsiderations of the complex social order that constitutes race in America.

Afro-Realisms and the Romances of Race expands critical understandings of American literary realism and African American literature by destabilizing the rigid binaries that too often define discussions of race, genre, and periodization.

MELISSA DANIELS-RAUTERKUS is assistant professor of English at the University of Southern California.



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African American Studies / Literary Criticism / African American History



ADVANCED PRAISE

“A bold book that will spark new conversations among scholars and readers.”

— M. GIULIA FABI

“An important intervention that has key resonance for contemporary understandings of blackness.”

— RUSS CASTRONOVO

“This book advances our understanding of ‘blackness’ and ‘African American literature’ as crucial fields of academic inquiry.”

— GENE ANDREW JARRETT

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