



The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867

Dana D. Nelson

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Dana Nelson provides a study of the ways in which Anglo-American authors constructed "race" in their works from the time of the first British colonists through the period of the Civil War. She focuses on some eleven texts, ranging from widely-known to little-considered, that deal with the relations among Native, African, and Anglo-Americans, and places her readings in the historical, social, and material contexts of an evolving U.S. colonialism and internal imperialism. Nelson shows how a novel such as *The Last of the Mohicans* sought to reify the Anglo historical past and simultaneously suggested strategies that would serve Anglo-Americans against Native Americans as the frontier pushed farther west. Concluding her work with a reading of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Nelson shows how that text undercuts the racist structures of the pre-Civil War period by positing a revised model of sympathy that authorizes alternative cultural perspectives and requires Anglo-Americans to question their own involvement with racism.



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