

AHA 2015 - Multisession workshop - Slavery as History, Slavery as Fiction

CALL FOR PAPERS

129th American Historical Association Meeting New York City January 2 – 5, 2015

Multi-session Workshop
Slavery as History, Slavery as Fiction

Convenor
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At least since the 1960s scholars have discussed the boundaries between history and fiction, including the specific features that characterize these two forms of discourse (Barthes 1967, Hayden White 1973). Whereas literary critics like Patricia Waugh have argued that “writing of history is a fictional act” (Waugh 1984: 48), Linda Hutcheon has forged the term “historiographic metafiction” to discuss novels that combine self-reflexion and historical events and characters, by questioning the status of what historians call “facts” (Hutcheon 1988, 122). Likewise, historian Hayden White has pointed out that writing of history relies on narrative, a mode of representation that remains deeply attached to the archives that exist in textual forms (White 1984). Although during the 1990s, the postmodernist debate on history as narration gradually lost its visibility, other scholars continued developing the dialogue between history and fiction, by underscoring the role of fiction in producing knowledge (Schaeffer 1999) and insisting on how visual images can serve as historical evidence (Burke 2001). Today, scholars face the challenge of making histories of slavery understandable to wider audiences either in scholarly books or museum exhibitions. At the same time, movies and television series (*Roots*, *Quilombo*, *Xica da Silva*, *Amistad*, *Tropiques Amers*, *Lincoln*, *Django Enchained*, and *Twelve Years a Slave*) as well as books and novels (*Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Rough Crossings* by Simon Schama, *Island Beneath the Sea* by Isabel Allende, *The Book of Negroes* by Lawrence Hill) have been portraying slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in various ways. This workshop explores the use of fiction in writing history and the use of history in works of fiction like novels, films, and various kinds of artworks. How historians of slavery appropriate or allegedly reject fictional devices to write their works? How fiction and imagination can help filling the gaps left by primary sources? How the historical mode of discourse is employed in novels, films, and artworks exploring slavery as a theme in order to sustain the motto “based on a true story”? Focusing on any time period and geographical areas, this workshop will discuss the intersections between history and fiction. Papers exploring narrative and fictional dimensions of primary sources (letters, diaries, travelogues, wills, photographs, drawings, and others) and the historical dimension of films, novels, plays, television series, paintings, installations, and other artworks are particularly welcome. The workshop will comprise the traditional formal panels, as well as roundtables.

References:

- Barthes, Roland. "Le discours de l'histoire." *Social Science Information* 6 (1967): 63-75.
- Burke, Peter. *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images As Historical Evidence*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. *Pourquoi la fiction?* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999.
- Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- White, Hayden. "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory." *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (1984): 1-33.
- White, Hayden V. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Please send your paper proposal no later than February 1st 2014 to:

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Paper proposals must contain:

- * Paper's title
- * Abstract (maximum 300 words)
- * Biographical paragraph (up to 250 words, no curriculum vitae, please)
- * Correct mailing and e-mail address
- * Audiovisual needs, if any

Chairs and commentators, please send:

- * Biographical paragraph (up to 250 words, no curriculum vitae, please)
- * Correct mailing and e-mail addresses

Please note:

- * Abstracts of proposals accepted by the AHA committee will be posted on the AHA program website.
- * Papers must be submitted on December 1st 2014

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