Harriet Wilson's New England: Race, Writing and Region

JerriAnne Boggis
Eve Allegra Raimon, University of Southern Maine
Barbara A. White (Ed.)

Document Type
Book

Description
In the mid-nineteenth century, Harriet E. Wilson, an enterprising woman of mixed racial heritage, wrote an autobiographical novel describing the abuse and servitude endured by a young black girl in the supposedly free North. Originally published in Boston in 1859 and "lost" until its 1983 republication by noted scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, is generally considered the first work of fiction written by an African American woman published in the United States.

ISBN
9781584656418

Publication Date
2007

Publisher
University of New Hampshire Press

City
Durham, N.H.

Keywords
Wilson, Harriet E., 1825-1900 -- Criticism and interpretation, African American women authors, Race in literature, New England -- In literature

Disciplines
African American Studies | American Literature | Literature in English, North America

Recommended Citation
Boggis, JerriAnne; Raimon, Eve Allegra; and White (Ed.), Barbara A., "Harriet Wilson's New England: Race, Writing and Region" (2007). Faculty and Staff Books. 52.
https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/facbooks/52

Here, Wilson explains that writing is the sole means by which she believes she can support herself and her child. After years of indentured servitude like that experienced by her fictional alter-ego Frado, Wilson's invalidism prevents her from other types of work. The letters in the appendix also discuss the economic limitations that Wilson's real-life illness placed upon her. BACK.

Gates notes that it is Harriet Wilson's child's death certificate that enabled scholars to determine her race and her authorship of the text. George Mason Wilson died from fever in February 1860.

