



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1978 Volume II: 20th Century Afro-American Culture

The Black Man in Late Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Comparison of the Short Stories of Page and Cable with Those of Their Black Counterparts, Chesnutt and Dunbar

Guide for Curriculum Unit 78.02.04
by Pamela Price Kabak

The end of the Nineteenth Century marked the birth of two distinct writing cultures in this country. The roots of this division are found in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century when a great deal of fiction emerged from a Southern literacy movement that concentrated on a romantic depiction of the relationship between masters and slaves. This unit compares the development of the unrealistic, albeit sympathetic, portrait of the Black slave in the short stories of two Southern white writers with the attempts made to correct such stereotypes in the works of two Black authors. All four men were widely published in popular magazines of the era. Preceding the discussion of the authors is background material on the history of the short story (which is? after all, the American literary genre). Charles W. Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar followed the traditions established by their white predecessors, Thomas Nelson Page and George Washington Cable. These Black writers drew from the structure and form of their white predecessors while moving beyond the traditional limitations placed upon Black themes and characterizations. Specific pieces written by each author are analyzed in the narrative; these same stories are used as models in several of the sample lesson plans presented in the text. A Student Reading List targets particularly useful short stories. Student and Teacher bibliographies complete the project. The unit was originally designed to be used as a three to five week component of a college level one-semester English elective on the American Short Story.

(Recommended for college-bound or advanced level students in English III).

Key Words

Afro-American Literature Short Story American

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