

American Studies 430
American Humor
M - Th: 3:30 - 4:50
GHH 108
Roger Williams University
Fall Semester, 2010

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Week of September 27, 2010

We're going to take a little break from Rourke this week, and pursue the idea of black humor a little further. We'll be returning to black humor more than once in the weeks that follow. We're going to be investigating white creators of "black" humor and black creators (and recorders—some of what we'll look at are literary creations recording folk tales) and see what we can discover about the types represented. Be warned that there are stereotypes galore here... Recognize that even if you don't find some of this material funny persons consumed it for amusement's sake in sufficient quantities to provide good livings for the creators.

For Monday, September 27

Read, in Watkins, African American Humor
Forward (Dick Gregory)
Introduction

xi -xiii
xvii - xxv

In Animal Tales and Rhymes

The Stories of Joel Chandler Harris:

5-16

Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy

The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story

Why Mr. Possum Loves Peace

How Mr. Rabbit Was Too Sharp for Mr. Fox

Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox

Mr. Fox is Again Victimized

You've had a chance to watch the Walt Disney version of the Tar Baby Story on the class web page from last week. Do you notice any difference between the characters as portrayed in the cartoon and as you might imagine them from the story?

If we think of these stories as "fables"—rather like Aesop's fables, we would expect to find a "moral" at the end...a short lesson to be learned. In your Journal...write a "moral" for as many of these stories as you can. Who does Mr. Rabbit Represent? Who does Mr. Fox Represent? Mr. Possum? What do you think.

[To learn more about Joel Chandler Harris visit the website](#) provided by the American Studies Department at the University of Virginia.

For Thursday, September 30

Read, in Russell Baker,

Four short tales by Zora Neale Hurston:

Talking Mule Story	453 - 454
Competition for a Girl	454 - 455
Woman's Strength Story	455 - 458
Squinch Owl Story	458 - 459

in Watkins

Also by Hurston, "Why Women Got the Advantage of Men	134 - 138
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By the time Zora Neale Hurston is collecting and publishing black humor we begin to see the "war of the sexes" through the eyes of black women. We'll encounter a number of black women humorists in this course. I think you're going to enjoy them. What I'd like to see here is how some of the situations we've seen in previous tales gets its own spin as the gender and race of the narrator changes. For example, you've already read about a sort of "competition" for a girl in the writings of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. How does this stack up against "Competition for a Girl" as you see it above. Record your views on this in your journal.

Hurston was one of the noted figures in what is known as the Harlem Renaissance. More about that later. For the present, read a bit about her and her works at the [Voices from the Gaps](http://voices.clu.umn.edu/artistpages/hurstonZora.php) website at the University of Minnesota.

To Prepare for where we're going next, look at the two Amos And Andy Presentations on the class website. <http://voices.clu.umn.edu/artistpages/hurstonZora.php>