

Call for Papers

Reconsidering Roots: Observations on the 40th Anniversary of a TV Mini-Series that changed the Way We Understood American Slavery

When the television series *Roots* premiered in 1977, Americans across the United States tuned in to watch the story of an enslaved African American family's continuing quest for freedom. Not only did the eight-part series exceed all expectations for ratings, but the drama garnered 37 Emmy nominations, ultimately winning nine. With over 100 million viewers tuning in to watch the finale, *Roots* became the most-watched television event of its day, and secured a place in television history. In many ways, *Roots* was unprecedented, and within our contemporary context has perhaps become unrepeatable. *Roots* put names, faces, and histories to what had too often been a monolithic block only referred to as "slaves," forcing viewers to consider, or reconsider the meaning of "the peculiar institution" and its enduring impact on American culture. In some respects, however, *Roots* may obscure certain complexities, and even reinforce its own set of myths about the history of slavery in the United States.

With the 40th anniversaries of the novel and the television series fast approaching, we feel that the time is ripe to consider the impact and continuing significance of this cultural phenomenon. In remembering *Roots*, how can the public gain greater insight into the social-political context of its debut, and understanding of its contemporary resurgence as a classic on black television? The miniseries begs for a nuanced investigation of mythmaking, gender, genealogy, and visual culture, as well as slave resistance, accommodation, and the consequences of race.

Reconsidering Roots aims to deconstruct how this TV mini-series both complicated and simplified our understanding of American slavery, and explores the remarkable tenacity of the film's visual, cultural, and political impact on American history. We seek scholarly essays that interrogate the historical impact of *Roots*, as well as those that assess its place in contemporary U.S. culture.

Potential topics might explore (but are not limited to the following):

- *Roots* and the Historiography of Slavery
- *Roots* in the Classroom
- The Politics of *Roots* in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s
- *Roots* and the Politics of Gender
- *Roots* as Family History
- *Roots* and Race
- *Roots*, Historical Authenticity, and Processes of Mythmaking

- *Roots* as a Tool for Racial Reconciliation
- *Roots* and the Burgeoning Interest in Genealogy
- The Reception of *Roots* in the U.S. and Abroad
- The Place of *Roots* in the Age of Obama
- *Roots* and the Power of Image
- *Roots* as a Response to Representations of Slavery in the Jim Crow Era
- *Roots*, Neo Slave Narratives, and the tradition of African American Memoir
- *Roots and the Black Body*
- *Roots and Violence*
- *Roots* and the Blaxploitation Genre
- Marketing *Roots*
- The Impact of *Roots* on Subsequent Representations of Slavery in Film and Visual Culture
- *Roots* and White Audiences
- *Roots on Black Television*
- *Roots and the Politics of Plagiarism*
- *Roots* and the Politics of Alex Haley

We welcome original papers from scholars from a wide range of disciplines (History, American Studies, African American Studies, English, Film, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Journalism, Education, etc). Please email proposals to Erica L. Ball (California State University, Fullerton) or Kellie Carter Jackson (Harvard University) at reconsideringroots@gmail.com by Friday **November 15, 2013**. Proposals should include: A 300-500 word abstract of your paper, and a brief C.V. Completed chapters of 7,000-9,000 words will be due by **June 15th, 2014**. For questions or inquires please email eball@fullerton.edu or kjackson@fas.harvard.edu.