



Harriet Wilson: Our Nig, or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black

Harriet Wilson

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"*Our Nig*, or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black" is the tale of Frado, a mixed-race girl who was abandoned by her white mother after the death of her black father. Frado became the servant of the Bellmonts, a lower-middle-class white family in the free North, while slavery was still legal in the South. Frado's story is a tragic one; she suffered many abuses in the Bellmont household. After leaving the Bellmonts, Frado eventually married a black fugitive slave, who later abandoned her. Strangely enough, Frado's oppressors were Abolitionists, leading some readers who have studied "*Our Nig*" to claim that the book was written by a white and was a novel, rather than a true story. Nonetheless, many Black women who have served as "wage slaves" since abolition have found a spokesperson in Harriet Wilson. "*Our Nig*" will help the reader not just to pity such individuals, but to understand their ability to fight back with their minds. Through "*Our Nig*," Harriet Wilson gives a general idea of what a Negro's life in the North was like, and, in many cases, it was not much different from that of a slave in the South. Frado's mistress was brutal beyond measure. Many of the other family members were reasonably kind, though not kind enough to put a stop to the abuse. Despite the abuse, Frado did manage to obtain a small measure of schooling and eventually became a Christian, though her mistress opposed it. Harriet Wilson drew from her own life experience in writing "*Our Nig*." She also combined and subverted two literary styles, the sentimental novel and the slave narrative. Though rather unsettling, "*Our Nig*" is of more value than books such as "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" because it is told from the point of view of the victim, as opposed to a sympathetic white.

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