Americans in the Golden State: The Rhetoric of Identity in Four California Social Protest Novels

Abstract
This dissertation examines the rhetorical strategies of four California social protest novels of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). I argue that among these four texts, those that succeeded rhetorically—Ruiz de Burton's and Steinbeck's—did so by making it possible for their mostly white, middle-class audiences to identify with their characters along class, race, and other demographic lines. The rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke help explain the complex ways these novels invite audience identification with some characters while creating distance with others. I also examine the roles of sentiment and naturalism in each text's rhetorical success or failure. Although these novels were all written or read as social protest fiction, there exists no full-length analysis of the rhetorical strategies these writers employ. In their arguments over California land ownership and the land's potential wealth, the novels reveal much about how American identity was constructed during this period. Chapter One argues that in *The Squatter and the Don,* Ruiz de Burton encourages identification by blurring racial lines and emphasizing her characters' social class, presenting the Alamar family as entrepreneurial Americans who can pass for white and who blend easily with upper-crust New York society. Chapter Two focuses on the ways Jackson creates Native American characters in *Ramona* who possess some traits of "American" identity such as whiteness, domesticity, and work skills. Jackson's characters, however, remain too exotic for the reader to identify with them, and thus her novel has been read as romance rather than protest. Chapter Three argues that in *The Octopus,* Ruiz de Burton's is too deterministic to succeed as social protest against the railroad monopoly, but that Norris is arguing instead for a global expansion of U.S. capitalism. Chapter Four demonstrates how in *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck enables identification by emphasizing the Okies' Anglo heritage and their willingness to work; like Ruiz de Burton, he also employs an effective balance between sentiment and naturalism.
Clearly, American society isn’t as color-blind as people would like to believe. In Rhetorics of Whiteness: Postracial Hauntings in Popular Culture, Social Media, and Education, contributors reveal how identifications with racialized whiteness continue to manifest themselves in American culture. The sixteen essays that comprise this collection not only render visible how racialized whiteness infiltrates new twenty-first-century discourses and material spaces but also offer critical tactics for disrupting this normative whiteness. Few whiteness studies texts have been published in rhetoric and composition in the past decade, so this collection should quickly become mandatory reading. AMERICANA: “‘Sons of the Forest’: The Native American Jeremiad Materialized in the Social Protest Rhetoric of William Apess, 1829-1836” by Willie J. Harrell, Jr. / Willie J. Harrell, Jr. is associate professor of English at Kent State University where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in African-American Literature. He is author of Origins of the African American Jeremiad: The Rhetorical Strategies of Social Protest and… / “‘Sons of the Forest’: The Native American Jeremiad Materialized in the Social Protest Rhetoric of William Apess, 1829-1836” by Willie J. Harrell, Jr. Willie J. Harrell, Jr. is associate professor of English at Kent State University where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in African-American Literature. California's long association with gold make this a natural nickname for the state. From the naming of the state in the 16th century to the California Gold Rush of 1848 and the fields of yellow poppies (official state flower) that bloom in the springtime, gold, in one form or another, has been intertwined with the history and development of California. What state is called the golden state? Why was California nicknamed the golden state? The Gold Rush pretty much established California as a state, growth would have been much slower otherwise. Also there is fields of golden poppies, the golden ga…te bridge, and the golden sunsets The Golden Gate was a name given to the haven of the bay by Sir Francis Drake. Why is California the golden state?