

## Love and literacy

Last week, we had our first post by [Darlene Clark Hine](#), a professor of both African American studies and history at Northwestern University, who feels strongly that romance fiction is nothing to be scoffed at. This week Hine gives two more reasons that popular romance matters!

### **Darlene Clark Hine, professor of history, Northwestern University**

**Darlene Clark Hine:** But the thing that strikes me so much, really deeply, is how people convey the lessons that love is great and it's wonderful, but it's never easy. It's often hard. It's often hard to find. It's hard to keep. It's hard to express. These novels are—or popular romance—help us to get into places in our consciousness and in our spirit, in our souls that we might not be able to easily access in other ways. So there is something that I think is very therapeutic about popular romance, the whole genre. When I look back over the slave narratives that are embedded, these love stories are embedded, I think about how—what a relief it must have been to be able to write their feelings down.

Because not only was love often sacrificed and assaulted, black people were not supposed to learn how to read and write. Literacy was a capital offence in the slaveholding South, and black people took their lives in their hands when they revealed that they could read and write, and white people broke laws when they taught enslaved African Americans to read and to write. Literacy, to me, is equally as important as when we're talking about the romance, that there was this political dimension, this cultural and educational dimension. And if women

and some men—a lot of men out there undercover who are reading these works—are using them as a way to enhance their literacy, vocabulary, as well as knowledge of geography and physical places, there's a lot more going on in the lives and minds of readers of these romance—of popular romance, and I think we might not pay enough attention to that side of the consumer, if you will, as much as we celebrate and applaud the producers, the creators.

Is reading a revolutionary act? Is reading romance even more so?

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