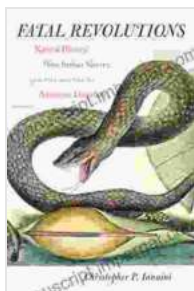


# Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Roots of American Literature

## An Exploration of the Intricate Connections

The history of the Transatlantic slave trade and its profound impact on the development of American literature is an intricate and complex narrative. At the heart of this narrative lies the intersection of Natural History, a prevalent intellectual pursuit during the colonial era, and the brutal institution of West Indian slavery.

This article delves into the fascinating connections between Natural History, West Indian slavery, and the genesis of American literature. We will trace the ways in which naturalists, explorers, and writers of the time utilized natural history to justify the enslavement of African peoples and to construct racial hierarchies.



## Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature (Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American ... and the University of North Carolina Press) by Christopher P. Iannini

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 4306 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 313 pages

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## **Natural History and the Justification of Slavery**

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Natural History became a dominant intellectual discipline, driven by the insatiable curiosity to explore and classify the natural world. This pursuit extended to the human realm, with scientists and explorers attempting to categorize different human populations based on physical characteristics.

Tragically, Natural History was often distorted and weaponized to support the racist ideology of the time. Naturalists argued that the physical differences between Europeans and Africans were evidence of inherent racial superiority and inferiority. This twisted logic was used to justify the enslavement of African peoples and the establishment of a racial caste system.

## **The Literary Echoes of Natural History**

The influence of Natural History on the development of American literature cannot be overstated. Early American writers such as William Byrd II and Thomas Jefferson heavily incorporated natural history into their writings, often using it to reinforce the prevailing racial ideologies.

Byrd's "The History of the Dividing Line" (1728) is a prime example of this trend. In his account of a surveying expedition along the bFree Download of Virginia and North Carolina, Byrd describes the Native Americans and enslaved Africans he encounters through the lens of Natural History, reinforcing the perceived racial hierarchy of the time.

## **Environmental Racism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism**

The legacy of Natural History and West Indian slavery continues to reverberate in contemporary society through the concept of environmental

racism. Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate exposure of minority communities to environmental hazards. This disparity can be traced back to the historical displacement of African Americans and other marginalized groups to areas with lower environmental quality.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, a field of literary study, examines the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of the relationship between race, nature, and the environment. By analyzing literary works through an ecocritical lens, scholars can uncover the hidden narratives of environmental racism and its impact on marginalized communities.

The connections between Natural History, West Indian slavery, and the roots of American literature are deeply intertwined and complex. By understanding the historical context and the ways in which natural history was employed to justify slavery and racial hierarchies, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of American literature and its enduring legacy.

The ongoing struggle against environmental racism and the pursuit of a more just and sustainable society demand that we continue to explore and challenge the historical narratives that have shaped our understanding of race, nature, and the environment.



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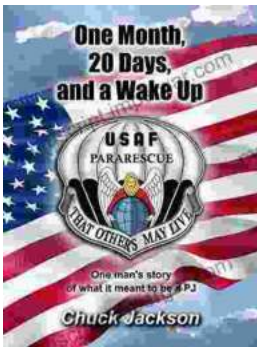
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