

AFRO-PESSIMISM & BLACK OPTIMISM

in Africana Literature: Before Fanon

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This presentation will attempt to theorize a “literary” genealogy of Afro-pessimism and black optimism from shortly before the initial publication of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Besides Fanon, important though he may be, who else might we add to the intellectual genealogy of black critical theory? And to whom might we turn for a new “critique of the subject”? Indeed, this presentation

will implicate new texts into the discourse—early Anglophone Caribbean and African American work not typically associated with the Afro-pessimist/black-optimist turn in critical theory. How might the work of black writers as diverse as W. E. B. Du Bois or C. L. R. James, for example, change the way we think about Afro-pessimism/black optimism? What new Afro-pessimistic/black optimistic thoughts do their works make possible? In a sense, how do texts themselves effectively perform or fail to embody the very theories of Afro-pessimism/black optimism? This presentation will use Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1938) as touchstones for thinking more closely about these questions.

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**Monday,
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4:00-5:30 p.m.

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