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Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

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Center For New England Culture Celebrates Publication Of Book About Harriet Wilson

Contact: [Lori Wright](#)
603-862-0574
UNH Media Relations

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DURHAM, N.H. — The Center for New England Culture at the University of New Hampshire will celebrate the publication of "Harriet Wilson's New England: Race, Writing, and Region" at a reception Friday, Dec. 7, 2007, from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Milne Special Collections, Dimond Library.

The event is free and open to the public. It will include a discussion with the editors and contributors. Published by the University of New Hampshire Press/University Press of New England, the editors are JerriAnne Boggis, director of the Harriet Wilson Project; Eve Allegra Raimon, associate professor of arts and humanities at the University of Southern Maine; and Barbara White, professor emerita of women's studies at UNH.

With a foreword by noted scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., the W. E. B. Dubois Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, the collection is the first devoted to Wilson and her novel. It includes essays that seek to understand Wilson within New England and New England as it might have appeared to Wilson and her contemporaries. Contributors include prominent historians, literary critics, psychologists, librarians, and diversity activists.

"This is a thought-provoking collection that provides valuable new historical context and advances current scholarly discussions on Wilson and her work and, wonderfully, offers a selection of more personal writings and conversations from people local to Milford and associated with the Harriet Wilson Project. These final essays demonstrate the powerful connections Wilson's contemporary readers make between her story and their lives and sense of culture and history in New Hampshire now," said Dana Nelson, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English and American Studies, Vanderbilt University.

In the mid-19th century, Harriet E. Wilson, an enterprising woman of mixed racial heritage, wrote an autobiographical novel describing the abuse and servitude endured by a young black girl in the North. Originally published in Boston in 1859 and "lost" until its 1983 republication by Gates, "Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black" is generally considered the first work of fiction written by a black woman published in the United States.

Wilson's New England joins other critical works in the emerging field known as the New Regionalism in resurrecting historically hidden ethnic communities in rural New England and exploring their erasure from public memory. It offers new literary and historical interpretations of "Our Nig" and responds to renewed interest in Wilson's account of servitude and racial discrimination in the North.

For further information, contact David Watters, director, UNH Center for New England Culture, at 603-862-3983 or david.watters@unh.edu.

