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# Novel Questions: Writing About Slavery for Multiple Audiences

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## Abstract

The two fields I teach and publish in – nineteenth-century American literature and creative writing – feel distinct, with no overlap between the audiences each reaches. My first novel, however, in many ways takes up the scholarly questions I have engaged with in my research and my teaching. *Fingerprints of Previous Owners* is set at a Caribbean resort built on top of a former slave plantation and follows a hotel maid who secretly excavates the crumbling ruins that her island community refuses to acknowledge and the resort wants to keep hidden. I began this novel while teaching a Caribbean literature course on San Salvador Island in the Bahamas: a place where crumbling plantation ruins interest researchers more than residents. The novel explores questions that I have previously approached as a scholar of Civil War literature: how should we commemorate slavery and how are individuals affected by community trauma? For this roundtable, I will discuss the process of refraction through which such questions can be taken up by fiction, dramatizing theoretical concepts for readers in an individualized way. I will also share my experiences discussing the book and its concerns with wide-ranging audiences in non-academic venues such as readings and book club gatherings. Finally, I will comment on the process of applying for research fellowships for a creative project.

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