

Social historians and literary critics would do well to follow Payne's example. His essay implies a need for an in-depth historical study of how and why ethnic minorities have consistently demonstrated an intense loyalty to America (in spite of social discrimination) by committing themselves to Uncle Sam during any war. The case of the Navaho Code Talkers and the small band of Japanese Americans who willingly went to war against Japan and Germany during World War II comes to mind here. Payne's essay also prods us to call for more literary studies of ethnic American fiction which centers on the theme of ironic patriotism. How do other creative artists dramatize this theme? Do they, as did Griggs, tone down the real violence (see Payne's discussion of the Frazier B. Baker murder in the above essay), so as to avoid offending their readers or being accused of exaggerating the truth? Are there other ethnic American stories like "A Man They Didn't Know" which show masses of a people who are ready and willing to forgive and forget and to die for America if only she would give a verbal promise of a long overdue Justice?

Those who embark on such a study must keep in mind the need to rescue some of the lesser-known writers and their works from a literary obscurity. Here again Payne's essay sets a fine example. James D. Corrothers was known primarily as a poet during his day, and the artistic flaws of Sutton E. Griggs' novels have often led to their being summarily dismissed from serious classroom study. Payne, however, extracts the ideas behind each prose piece and convincingly reveals them as the strongest element in both works. We already know that Afroamerican novelists can handle characterization, plot, and setting in fiction; Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Richard Wright are shining examples of that. We should not hesitate, therefore, to study and re-evaluate the less celestial works in a broader context, such as the historical, so that their redeeming qualities are brought to the forefront.

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Critique

The foregoing essay by James Robert Payne describes two important pieces of Afroamerican literature and places them within their historical context. Payne offers a tantalizing account of those examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century black nationalist writing; he fails, however, to explain their historical

significance in terms of black nationalist thought around the turn of the century.

Black nationalist ideology was as much a reflection of white American society as a reaction to it. As noted by scholars of the subject, territorial separatism and emigration (colonization) were prominent and interrelated themes during the second half of the nineteenth century. [See John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Nationalism in America*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.)] On the other hand, there persisted a basic optimism in American society among some black nationalists. These saw their destiny in a reformed United States rather than in their own black nation-state. Both those ideological streams of black nationalist thought, separatism and reformism, are represented in the selected pieces of fiction, Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* and Corrothers's "A Man They Didn't Know." One was a reflection of white American society in that it shared a belief in the basic rhetoric of equality and in a common heritage, culture, and destiny, while the other was a reaction to white American society which, particularly during the economic hard times of the 1890s, was virulently racist. Violence against blacks, including beatings and lynchings, was commonplace, and fear prevailed in many black communities. [Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.)]

Two influential figures dominated the period, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, with their contrasting tactics for black redemption. Both, nonetheless, reflected a middle-class optimism in American culture, and envisioned a black elite which would win the dignity sought by all Afroamericans. Lesser known, but also influential, contemporaries included among others Henry Adams, Arthur Anderson, T. Thomas Fortune, and Bishop Henry M. Turner. Adams proposed a "territory of our own" while Anderson argued that the United States government should set aside territory for a black nation within its geographic confines for past injustices. Fortune, militant editor of the *New York Age*, founded the Afroamerican League in 1890. At the inaugural convention of the League, Fortune supported agitation, even revolt: "Who would be free," concluded Fortune, "must themselves strike the first blow." Bishop Turner, noted cleric of the African Methodist Episcopal church, probably more than any other person, led the black nationalist movement in the 1890s. Turner foreshadowed nationalists like Garvey and the Nation of Islam in advocating separatism and cultural nationalism. Separatism, resulting in a black state either

in Africa or the American Midwest, was a widespread sentiment among blacks during the 1890s. That was evident in the mass appeal of Turner's call for emigration to Africa, well-publicized all-black town experiments such as Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and proposals to create an all-black state in Oklahoma. [See Redkey, *Black Exodus*; and E. David Cronon. *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955.) Unlike Washington and Du Bois who appealed to the black bourgeoisie, these lesser known black nationalist leaders held the interest of the lower class and farmers who did not share the optimism of the middle class. An elaboration of the foregoing themes sheds further light on the historical significance of the two novels described by Payne.

Finally, an explanation of black attitudes toward Asian Americans, Japan, and the "Yellow Peril" would have added to Payne's discussion on Corrothers's "A Man They Didn't Know." Generally, according to one historian, Afroamericans saw the "Yellow Peril" hysteria and United States government mistreatment of the Japanese in America as simply the same racism which oppressed them. In fact, blacks often held up the Japanese Americans as a model to emulate; Booker T. Washington observed, "The Japanese race is a convincing example of the respect which the world gives to a race that can put brains and commercial activity into the development of the resources of a country." [David J. Hellwig. "Afro-American Reactions to the Japanese and the Anti-Japanese Movement, 1906-1924." *Phylon*. 38:1 (1977) 93-104; Cf., David J. Hellwig, "Black Reactions to Chinese Immigration and the Anti-Chinese Movement: 1850-1910." *Amerasia Journal*. 6:2 (1979) 25-44.] Further, the intervention of the Japanese government on behalf of the Japanese in America in the San Francisco school board affair (1907-1908) was instructive to Afroamericans of how a militarily strong mother country could provide a wedge against racial oppression in the U.S. The appeal to Japan, thus, in Corrothers's "A Man They Didn't Know" had significance beyond the notion of the "Yellow Peril," for a period following the publication of the fictional story, the linking of Afroamericans with Japan for black liberation was a persistent notion. [See Robert A. Hill. *The Black Man*. (New York: 1975)]

Black organizations such as the Negro Alliance and the National Negro Congress were closely monitored by the FBI for possible subversion through an alliance with the Japanese. [Bob Kumamoto. "The Search for Spies: American Counterintelligence and the Japanese American Community, 1931-1942." *Amerasia Journal*. 6:2 (1979) 50-51.] Perhaps of more substance was the "Operation Magic"

deciphers, recently declassified, which identified Taro Terasaki as the “sparamaster chief” in Washington, D.C., who ran the entire Japanese espionage network in the western hemisphere. Terasaki was reported to have received half a million dollars to cultivate informants in the U.S., and to approach “very influential Negro leaders” in the hope of directing racial discontent “to stall the program the U.S. plans for national defense and the economy, as well as for sabotage.” [John Costello. *The Pacific War*. (London: Rawson Wade, 1981) 78, 613.]

Referring to Corrothers’s “A Man They Didn’t Know,” Payne offered sage advice: “like *Imperium in Imperio*, it must, to be fully understood, be read in its historical context.”

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