

Indeed, even now the majority ignores the direction blacks point. That direction is toward the fulfillment of the American Dream. The majority have opted for the selfish fulfillment of their private wants in what is considered a pragmatic approach to governance. The potential that blacks have for determining chaos or order in the nation is illustrated by an analysis of the Presidential election returns of 1980. The majority chose the “privatization” of community interests, excepting war preparedness. Blacks chose orderly progress toward democratic and equitable fulfillment of the American Dream.

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Critique

James Payne’s thoughtful and carefully documented essay stresses the importance of evaluating ethnic American, specifically Afro-american, fiction within its historical context. The historical information he provides in his essay concerning the Afroamerican response to the Spanish-American War and to America’s paranoia of a supposed “Yellow Peril” does indeed shed light on how Griggs and Corrothers each imaginatively re-invested a specific social reality with an Afroamerican revolutionary furor—a rage which ironically had the best interest of the country at heart.

We learn from Payne’s essay that Afroamericans and their terrifying encounters with white violence during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were virtually ignored by the American government—the one segment of the American social structure which could have done something constructive about it. Both Griggs and Corrothers were using fiction to protest this total disregard of the Afroamerican community’s welfare and, above all, the American disregard of the intense devotion and loyalty which most Afroamericans had for the country at that time. As Payne so aptly summarizes in his essay, both *Imperium in Imperio* and “The Man They Didn’t Know” were intended as warnings to their respective white American audiences that the Afroamerican community had the potential to justifiably abandon the United States in favor of an alliance with other peoples of color who had been the victims of Anglo-Saxon violence and aggression.

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