



"Born in a Mighty Bad Land": The Violent Man in African American Folklore and Fiction (Blacks in the Diaspora)

Jerry H. Bryant

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The figure of the violent man in the African American imagination has a long history. He can be found in 19th-century bad man ballads like "Stagolee" and "John Hardy," as well as in the black convict recitations that influenced "gangsta" rap. "Born in a Mighty Bad Land" connects this figure with similar characters in African American fiction. Many writers?McKay and Hurston in the Harlem Renaissance; Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison in the '40s and '50s; Himes in the '50s and '60s? saw the "bad nigger" as an archetypal figure in the black imagination and psyche. "Blaxploitation" novels in the '70s made him a virtually mythical character. More recently, Mosley, Wideman, and Morrison have presented him as ghetto philosopher and cultural adventurer. Behind the folklore and fiction, many theories have been proposed to explain the source of the bad man's intra-racial violence. Jerry H. Bryant explores all of these elements in a wide-ranging and illuminating look at one of the most misunderstood figures in African American culture.

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