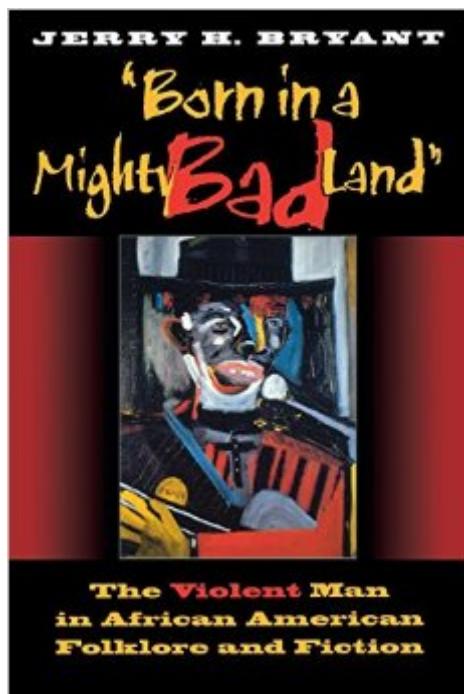


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"Born In A Mighty Bad Land": The Violent Man In African American Folklore And Fiction (Blacks In The Diaspora)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a book about African American "badmen" like Stagolee, John Hardy, Railroad Bill, and Devil Winston and how this archetypal figure gets taken up by black novelists, convict "toasters" and gangsta rappers. It tells the story of the defiance of this black folk hero and how middle class novelists and commercial rap artists soften and exploit an originally spontaneous figure of freedom that first emerges at the end of the nineteenth century. Jerry Bryant is professor emeritus of English,

California State University, Hayward. By the way, the 5-star rating isn't vanity, it's just that some rating is required by and I figured it would be counter-productive to give my book anything less. JB

My title comes from the 1/16/2006 newspaper article by Cynthia Tucker in the San Francisco Chronicle. This book by Jerry Bryant gives historical background on the "bad man" image and why it finds support in the Black community. "The popularity of thug culture is among the most serious of modern-day threats to Black America . . ." says Cynthia Tucker. The sad fact is that the victims are likely to be young black men. This is a great book that should be read by all people interested in reducing violence in their communities.

A really interesting overview and analysis of the "baad man" as a central figure in African-American literature, tracing the origins from his earliest appearances in myth and folklore. Lively, literate without being pedantic, and full of interesting and surprising examples. Real insights into such major figures as Richard Wright and Toni Morrison, along with a fascinating section on the sources and achievements of Ice-T and the contemporary rappers that I, never a rap fan, found really eye-opening..

Jerry Bryant has written a most compelling study of the African-American male using history, poetry, song, literature, along with myth and fact. This is a must read for anyone interested in, deeply or just superficially, the ways and the cultural whys and wherefors of the black man in american...yesterday and today. It is done with sensitivity and thoughtfulness and worth anyone's time...and it is damned readable!

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