Black Masculinity And The Frontier Myth In American Literature

Michael K Johnson

In Black Masculinity and the Frontier Myth in American Literature, Michael K. Johnson examines the writings of black authors whose works use the mythologized frontier to explore black masculinity and identity formed in an environment free of racism and race-based restrictions. Black writers have reworked the mythology of the American West to address black male experiences more authentically, Johnson argues, grappling with such concerns as racial assimilation and the notion of "regenerative violence" as a method of masculine initiation. White-authored stories of frontier conquest often ignore black experiences. By Michael K. Johnson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. That Johnson highlights the extranational contours of the American frontier myth makes his study relevant to an increasingly transnational American studies and, to an extent, also underscores the utility of global and transnational frameworks in studies of the American Great Plains. Johnson's early invocation of the iconography of Sonny Rollins's album Way out West may leave some readers hungry for even more historical examples of popular invocations of the frontier myth to complement the discussion of literary works. This is a fine and well-crafted book.