Hisao KISHIMOTO

Most black nationalists writing between 1890 and World War I, like Booker T. Washington, William H. Ferris, W.E.B. Du Bois, and that throwback to the nineteenth century, Marcus Garvev, were committed to the Victorian sentimental racialism that Griggs exemplified. There are self-accusatory tendencies in black nationalism and Griggs's (sic) thinking was like that of many black nationalists when he accused blacks of being too submissive and accommodating. He was more influenced by white racialism than he knew, for he tended to employ in his rhetoric many of the same degrading stereotypes that his contemporaries were inventing.⁽¹⁾

I. The Hindered Hand: or, The Reign of the Repressionist

In this work Griggs treats miscellaneous themes including murder and violence in the South in the context of a melodramatic plot complicated with subplots. By successive intermarriage to mulattoes, all traces of black blood have been eradicated from the main characters' appearances. The heroine's mother, a mulatto, whose ancestors can be traced back to an illustrious white man, marries a mulatto who is almost white. They have two girls and a boy, however, only the heroine's complexion plainly shows her black heritage. Years later, her father becomes Mayor, her mother worries about the acceptance of white society. One day, after she is not invited to an important social event because she is black, she sets fire to her house in a frantic attempt to eradicate her family's identity in the flames. All of the members of the family go into hiding, all but the heroine, who in the confusion, is left alone. Without any family ties, she goes to Almaville, concealing her past and changing her name to Tiara Merlow. There she becomes acquainted with Minister Ensal Elliwood, Earl Bluefield, Gus Martin and the Crump family. Ensal, Earl, and Gus are mutual friends who fought in the Spanish-American War together. Gus Martin, a black with Indian blood, can read and write, but is by no mean as well educated as either Ensal or Earl. Ensal and Earl represent antithetical types of blacks, the conservative and the radical.

Mrs. Arabelle Seabright (alias used by Tiara's mother after the fire), who is staying at a hotel frequented by the wealthiest aristocrates in Almaville, plotting to marry her daughter Eunice to Mr. H.G.Volress who has ambitions to run for Congress. After Eunice and Volress get married and start out on their honeymoon, Eunice, who was forced into marriage by her shrewd, scheming mother, drops a sleeping pill into her husband's cup and disappears while he is asleep.

Another subplot involves Foresta Crump, who is working for Mr. Arthur Daleman, Jr. to pay off a loan from him for the funeral of her brother, Harry. Although she thinks that she is working for Mr. Daleman, in reality, he is keeping her as a servant. Foresta is given day off for Alene Daleman and Roman Mansford's wedding ceremony. After the wedding she doesn't want go back to the Daleman's house. She intends to run away with her lover, Bud Harper, but it happens that Alene is murdered in her sleep in Foresta's room and Bud Harper is charged with the murder. He is arrested by the sheriff, but a white mob in a maniacal fury lynches him and hangs him from a bridge. Bud is not murderer, and Roman Mansford, who has an inkling of this, decides to search for the person responsible for the crime. He discovers that indeed Bud did not kill Alene and, moreover, that Bud was not really hanged. Actually, the culprit is Dave Harper, Bud's brother, who after serving a two-year prison sentence got a job working for a saloon patronized only by whites in Almaville where he could conceal his identity. One day he overhears that Arthur Daleman, Jr. wants Foresta to be his next rape. Keeping a watch on the Daleman house, he sees Arthur Daleman, Jr. enter the servant girl's room. Assuming that Foresta is favorably receiving his attentions Dave determines to kill them both. In a blind rage he believes that he has killed Foresta, although Daleman Jr. had already killed the woman in Foresta's room, that is, Alene. On the way to the Daleman's house Dave met Leroy Crutcher who mistook him for Bud because Dave and Bud strongly resemble, and while wandering around the city suffering from his misdeed, he is arrested and hung by a mob who also thinks that he is his brother.

Bud and Foresta there leave town and move to Mississippi where they buy a small farm near Maulville. Unfortunately, their neighbor Sidney Fletcher hates blacks so much that he tries to kill Bud. Instead, he ends up being killed by Bud. Foresta and Bud manage to escape for a while; however, eventually they are caught. They are tied to separate trees facing each other and tortured by the mob which cuts off their hair and their fingers, uses a corkscrew to wound their flesh, plucks their eyeballs from their sockets, and so on. Their brutal death is intended to be a warning to other blacks.

Earl then visits Ensal to disscuss the tragedy, and Earl insists on taking action to open the eyes of the American people. He decides to attack the state capitol with five hundred men. Ensal not only refuses to participate in the attack but accosts Earl by a bridge one night to force him to give up his plan. They have a big fight, and in the struggle, Earl draws a gun and aims at Ensal's heart. Instead the pistol falls from his hand and he is hit in the side. Ensal decides to bring Earl to Tiara's house because she lives nearby. Mrs.Crawford, the landlady of Tiara's previous lodging house, realizing that Tiara and Ensal loved each other, urged them to get married, but Tiara, worried about revealing her past, refused. After Mrs. Crawford's match-making attempt Tiara moved to the outskirts of Almaville near the river where Ensal comes to ask her help. After listening to Ensal story, she warmly accepts charge of Earl.

In another incident Mr. Seabright is startled awake one night by a man sitting in the corner of his bedroom turning a riffle over and over. The man orders Mr. Seabright to tell Mrs. Seabright that Rev. Percey G. Marshall is dying and would like to see her. The man is Gus Martin and Rev. Percey G. Marshall is actually the son of Mr. Seabright, that is, Tiara's brother. Gus Martin killed Percey G. Marshall because he thought that Tiara loved Percey, his friend's rival and one of those prejudiced whites who lynched Dave Harper. Gus Martin telephones the Sheriff, Governor, White House and British Embassy in order to ask that he be assured protection if he surrenders; however, he can not get assurance. Shouting "justice no where for a black man" in desperation Gus shoots down the men who are surrounding the building in an attempt to capture him.

While Tiara is sitting on a front porch after the departure Eunice and Earl she sees an account of the murder of Rev. Marshall. Instantly she hails a white man who is passing in a buggy and begs him to speed her to the city. With a flag of truce she enters the Seabright's house and persuades Gus to give himself up. As he steps outside, he is knocked down with a stick. He then sees Leroy Crutcher, who instigated the mob that lynched Dave Harper, and shoots him down. He then shoots himself and dies with a smile.

After this event Minister Ensal resigns from his church and decides to leave the country to establish a task force to better African society. Mrs. Elliwood persuades him to marry Tiara, but although Ensal loves Tiara, he misunderstands her, thinking she loves a white man, that is, Rev. Marshall. Tiara can not confess the truth and Ensal leaves the country in grief.

Before leaving America Ensal publishes an address entitled "To the People of the United States of America." During his absence, Tiara decides to send a copy to every American home and then travels from city to city pleading her cause: combining black people's capital and launching enterprises in which black can work alongside whites in order to eradicate the color line and advocating temperance. One day among her work-related correspondence she finds the familiar hand writing of a woman who turn out to be Eunice, alias Mrs. Johnson. Tiara takes the train for Goldsboro, Mississippi to meet her. Unfortunately she is unaware that she is followed by a black youth who reveals Eunice's address to H. G. Volress. Thus, Eunice is arrested on the charge of matrimonial fraud.

During the court case, Tiara appears as a witness and reveals her past; her relationship to Eunice and the past of Earl, Mr. Volress'son. Ultimately, Eunice is found innocent; however, in spite of her insisting that she is a white, the court decides she is black, thus realizing her worst fear. As a result of the verdict, she receives various insults, humilations, and discrimination and finally goes insane. To cure her Earl sends her to sanitarium in a northern city. Although this treatment is vain. He does finally hit upon political plan to free her from the cause of her sickness. Changing his name to Blue, he goes to the South, from city to city, to challenge the political powers there and ends up in glorious triumph at the poll.

In the meantime, Ensal Elliwood living in Monrovia, is doing everything possible for the worldwide awakening of the black race. Yet his heart is heavy with unrequited love. Reading one of Earl's letters he realizes that Earl needs his help to accomplish the defeat of the repressionists in the South. But he does not want to go back to the States until he happens to read an Almaville newspaper account of Eunice's trial which reveals the truth about Tiara. Immediately he goes back to America and meets Mr. Maul, an attorney, to plead earnestly for the conviction of the those who lynched Bud and Foresta. They go to the place where Bud and Foresta were lynched and have a long, earnest discussion which ends in agreement. Ensal sends a telegram to Earl: "Problem will now be solved. Aggressiveness on part of better element of whites assured. The whole machinery of the national government is in hands that will accord them support. Working basis in political matters agreed upon for better element of both races. Am writing you at length."⁽²⁾

Eunice recovers from her mental disease and Ensal and Tiara get married. On the next day they set out for Africa "to provide a home for the American Negro." ⁽³⁾

Even with some episodes deleted, the outline of this novel is terribly complicated. The incidents related to Foresta and Bud alone are enough material for a novel, however, Griggs put everything he knew into the book, making it a hodge-podge of laboriously stated facts. He especially emphasizes the truth of incidents in his "Notes for the Serious" and "Notes to the Third Edition." He states:

- 1. The author of The Hindered Hand (sic.) was an eyewitness of the driving of "Little Henry" to his death by the officers of the law.
- 2. The details of the Maulville burning were given the author by an eyewitness of the

tragedy, a man of national reputation among the Negroes

- 3. The experiences of Eunice upon being assigned to membership in the Negro race are by no means overdrawn....
- 4. The following statement of facts lends interest to the contention of one of the characters of The Hindered Hand(*sic.*), to the effect that the repressionist order of things brings forward; by its own force an undesirable type of officials. . . . ⁽⁴⁾

To be sure, it is sometimes important to distinguish truth from fact, but from the view point of literature it is not always necessary because only the arrangement of these facts constitutes the form or the unity of the novel as art.

The complexity of the plot causes ambiguity in the theme of the novel. Griggs adds too many spices to one dish; for instance, the theme of miscegenation, the injustice of the South, revolt, lynching, and emigration to Africa. Consequently, the novel does not center on a fixed point; it lacks continuity. The purpose, the nature, and the style of the novel are clearly apparent in the last few paragraphes.

Now that he has by this act lost favor with you, dear reader, we shall expose him to the utmost!

Dropping one of Tiara's hands, an arm stole around her waist, and Ensal kissed her again and, sad to say, again, and, vexing thought, again. And to cap the climax, the two were joyfully married that night, and on the next day set out for Africa, to provide a home for the American Negro, should the demented Eunice prove to be a wiser prophet than the hopeful, irrepressible Earl; should the good people of America, North and South, grow busy, confused or irresolute and fail, to the subversion of their ideals, to firmly entrench the Negro in his political rights, the denial of which and the blight incident thereto, more than all other factors, cause the Ethiopian in America to feel that his is indeed "The Hindered Hand." ⁽⁵⁾

Sterling Brown has clearly stated that "Griggs' *The Hindered Hand* (1905) is also a bad novel. The characters are models of decorum. In a passionate love scene at the end, the hero Ensal takes one of Tiara's hands in his, and then overwhelmed, takes the other."⁽⁶⁾ One thing can be said in defense of Griggs though. In the third edition it was wise of him to cut out "Leopard Spots," which appeared in former editions, and deal with it in the supplement to the novel because there were already to many discussions and addresses in the novel.

II. A Pointing the Way

Griggs' last novel is a story about Baug Peppers and Eina Rapona. Eina, a beautiful English-Spanish-Indian girl, is invited to live in Belrose by her school mate Clotille. After she goes to Belrose she worries about her identity beacause although her complexion is white she is part Moor. To find the answer of her racial identity she visits the law office of Seth Molair where she and he discuss the race problem in the South. Then she decides to investigate the black situation in the past and present with the help of Uncle Jack, her black servant. Through his narrative she gradually comes to

understand the black mind and comes to side with the blacks.

One day Uncle Jack invites Baug Pepper to have supper; Baug has been a source of mystery to Eina since her arrival. Eina serves them at dinner and Baug is captivated by her beauty. From then on Baug becomes one of her best friends, and Eina asks him to help solve the race question in Belrose. She intends to promoted race relations by properly guiding blacks and helping them work in union with the whites in the South. For that purpose they must win the aid of Seth Molair. In keeping with Baug's suggestions, Molair decides to keep watch on the black situation. Mr. Molair, however, happens to be interested in a black boy, who falls in love with a pretty black girl and quits his job. His employer has him arrested on the charge of vagrancy, and as his family can not pay the fine, the boy is sentenced to the chain gang. Everyday he has to clean up a street on the chain and the girl he loves passes the street at a decided time. One day he wants to finish his work before she passes but he can not. Desperately wanting to be out of her sight, he breaks his pick and bounds away. The guard who is watching lifts his gun and fires. Because of this wretched incident Mr. Molair decides to run for mayor. He enters the campaign race and wins the election.

Meanwhile Miss Letitia, Clotille's cousin is displeased with the amount of attention that Baug is giving Clotille. She thinks that it is Eina's influence. One day she opens Clotille's letter box without permission and finds a letter proving that Clotille loves Baug. Miss Letitia goes to Eina's house and shows the letter to her. Eina, who loves Baug is shocked to see it and disappears from the city sending a letter breaking off her relations with Baug. Soon after it is established that the letter was from Conroes Driscoll. Conroes used Baug's name in his correspondence so that a discovery of his letter would not give Clotille any trouble because of Miss Letitia's prejudice towards dark-skinned men like Conroes. Conroes and Clotille then get married the same day of the disclosure. Mr. Molair, reflecting on the situation of Conroes and Clotille, decides to appoint Conroes, a college graduate, to the position of head of the city fire department. Conroes decides to enter the Belrose fire department to win Miss Letitia's favor because she has a great admiration for fire fighters. Mayor Molair's impartial and progressive policy draws national attention and even presidental commendation. One evening there is a big fire around Mr. Rudolf's house. Conroes battles bravely, however, he dies in the blaze.

Uncle Jack goes to Alabama for the purpose of inaugurating a test clause of the recently adapted state constitution that provids for the elimination of the illiterate black voter without even considering the illiterate white voter. Unfortunately, however, under a charge of violating the law of Alabama he is shot and fatally injured. The news of Uncle Jack's exploit reaches the newspaper office and spreads all over the country. He breathes his last with a happy smile on his face.

After court Baug and Eina meet again. In the last scene, on national Decoration Day, Clotille, Conroes Driscoll Jr., Baug, Eina, and Seth Molair are arranging flowers on the grave of the Civil War dead and the graves of Conroes, Uncle Jack, and Aunt Lucy. And "in that one family plot, Southern at that, there is no color line."⁽⁸⁾ In short this is basically a love story of Baug and Eina with a happy ending. It is a novel praising the beauty of Eina. Eina herself says:

"Has the world judged aright? Am I beautiful?" asked Eina of herself. She lifted her bared, rounded arms, tapering so exquisitely at the wrists, and gazed at them for a few seconds, then lowered them. Eina now turned her attention to her face, neither oval nor long, perfectly proportioned, her features—mounth, nose, ears, forehead—each a work of art in itself. And well did her wealth of hair, black at a distance, but brown at close range, grace her head. And well might her eyes, those wonderously expressive, beautiful black eyes, matching well the long, dark brown eyelashes... the dominating center of a realm of beauty....⁽⁹⁾

Mr. Molair is struck with her amazing beauty:

Eina's complexion had been the bane of many an artist's life, portrait painters having despaired of reproducing its beautiful tints, defying, as they did, the power of the brush and pen....⁽¹⁰⁾

Mrs. Molair is also impressed:

When Eina appeared at the parlor door and Mrs. Molair caught sight of her beautiful face, flashing out in no uncertain way the nobility and loftiness of her soul, Mrs. Molair heaved a sight of relief. ⁽¹¹⁾

Baug is captivated by her beauty:

Eina looked so very pretty in her waitress' attire that Baug seemed to feel dimly that she was some sort of an angle whom Uncle Jack might drive away. Baug's adomonition and a look of rebuke in Eina's eye quieted Uncle Jack. ⁽¹²⁾

Moreover, she is beautiful for white and black people alike:

The dense crowd of white and colored people at this point, having its eyes focussed upon the two carriage because of the beauty of the occupants, saw the incident, and it created a mild sensation... $^{(13)}$

The display of Eina's beauty here and there overshadows the themes of interbreeding and politics. However, Hugh M. Gloster praised the novel in his Negro Voices in American Fiction with the comment:

Illustrating how the happiness of lovers is thwarted by an old maid afflicted by color mania, *Pointing the Way* sets forth the tragic consequences of intraracial (*sic.*) prejudice. The novel also seeks to show that the political co-operation of the races in the South contributes not only to the solution of the problems of that section but also to the general improvement of conditions the roughout the country. While deficient according to standards of art, *Pointing the Way* is another example of Griggs's (*sic.*) pioneering work in political fiction. (14)

Gloster admits the novel's failings as art but, nevertheless, it seems that he is an easy grader.

III. Griggs' Traits

In all of Griggs' novels there are several common traits: one concerns his theme and three characterize his technique. Regarding technique, his novels have long speeches or addresses and episodes. Although it is noteworthy that he is condidered "the first Negro to write a political novel of any consequence," ⁽¹⁵⁾ he delivers many long speeches for political purposess in his novels. Perhaps this is the heavy karma of a political novel. For example, he gives much space to Belton's speech in *imperium in Imperio*, pp.229 - 249, Dorlan's plan in *Unfettered*, pp.223 - 276, and the anti-Negro crusade of Mr. Thomas Dixon, Jr. in *The Hindered Hand* under the subtitle of "A Hindering Hand", pp.303 - 333.

Secondly, there are many melodramatic elements in his novels. As can be seen from the passages cited above without any exception, all his novels have melodramatic settings. The third trait is his episodic digressions. Throughout Griggs' novels there is one common feature, that is, allegories or slave narratives. He demonstrates excellent skill with these episodes, especially the slave narratives. In *Imperium in Imperio* he describes an episode concerning a Mississippian, the bare outline of which follows. Belton has excelled in everything in his class and consequently incurs the jealousy of his room-mate. One of his friends comes from Mississippi and is noted for his exceptional height and for the size and scent of his feet. The night before commencement day, his room-mate steals the Mississippian's socks and secretly substitutes these for Belton's silk pocket handkerchief. On commencement day Belton delivers an oration, and at the climax takes out his handkerchief to brush away the gathering tears. One can easily imagine the result. However, the scene lends spice to the dull development of the story, that is, the pathos of his oration and humor of those dirty socks in an atomosphere of "puttin' on of ole massa."

In Overshadowed, Griggs inserts Rev. Josia Nerve, D.D.S., who is an uneducated black whose "D.D.S." confered by his church, is derived from Latin-verb "to be". His speech gives us a good idea of his intelligence.

"Huh,-you-don't-understand;-D.-D.-S.- is not D.D., as-I-shall-presently-make-plain. My-people kept-on-growling-about-my-not-having-a-title. Of-course,-I-had-no-learning. I-can-only-talk-straight-by-calling-one-word-at-a-time, -as-you-must-have-noticed-already, -and-even-at-that-it-as-much-as-I-can-do-to-keep-my-tongue-from-twisting-back-to-the-old-time-nigger-dialect-which-I-spoke-for-thirty-years,- with-much-more-pleasure-than-I-do-this. My-people-kept-on-growling,-and-asking-me-if-there-was-nothing-they-could-do. (16)

This story by itself is very interesting, however, Griggs interjects it unnaturally into the novel. In *Unfettered* he somewhat clumsily introduces an episode about a street parade, and as a result, the credibility of the plot becomes strained. And then in *Hindered Hand* Griggs uses Mr. A. Hostility symbolically with very little effect. Stephen Dalton in *Unfettered* and Uncle Jack in *Pointing the way* are depicted vividly and the both enliven the dull stories; however, like his other slave characters, they are stereotypes of their time. Uncle Jack on his deathbed says:

"Tell de white folks dat ez er slave I done my bes'. Tell 'um how I keered fur my missus an' her dorters in de war times. Tell 'um dat I nevah done er crimial ack in my life, an' dat I died tryin'ter keep frum bein' blamed fur whut my grandaddy coulden't do, 'cause he wus er slave. Tell 'um dat I died in jail. I wuz tryin' ter git my case ter de S'preme Coat uv de United States, but frum whut dey tells me my case is goin' even higher dan dat, goin' ter de S'preme Coat erbove." ⁽¹⁷⁾

Lastly regarding the theme, as Hugh M. Gloster pointed out, there are lot of nationalistic elements. Griggs is "challenging and militant." To be sure, Belton Piedmont and Bernard Belgrave in *Imperium in Imperio*, Stephan Dalton and Dorlan Warthell in *Unfettered*, and Earl Bluefield and Gus Martin in *The Hindered Hand* have challenging and militant aspests; however, Belton is excuted by mulatto Bernard; Stephen Dalton, who fought most bravely, altered his resolve because of the persuassion of a black teacher on the side of the whites; and Earl Bluefield lost his energy for revolution after failure to participate in a revolt. Although Dorlan made his plan for revolution, its content was rather conservative, and only Gus Martin, a black with Indian blood, could keep his militant spirit. Moreover, inspite of his militancy, he often reveals his underlying motives as follows:

... We can now enjoy the companionship of Shakespear, Bacon, Milton, Bunyan, together with the favorite sons of other nations adopted into the English language, such as Dante, Hugo, Goethe, Dumas and hosts of others. Nor must we ever forget that it was Anglo-Saxon who snatched from our idolatrous grasp the deaf images to which we prayed, and the Anglo-Saxon who pointed us to the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. (*Imperun in Imperio*)⁽¹⁸⁾

"After all, after all, it may be that the Negro has chosen the best weapon for the attainment of his rights and priviledges. The Nihilist of Russia appeals to his bomb of dynamite; the American Indian to his tomahawk; but the American Negro has dropped upon his knees in his one room cabin and has sent up a prayer to God. (*Overshadowed*) ⁽¹⁹⁾

It wuz er pity de white folks didun't lead de cullud folks erway 'stead er ' sorthin ' to de midnight plan dat wuz so easy and glatly tuck up by bad people. (*Pointing the Way*)⁽²⁰⁾

As one can see from these passages, Sutton E. Griggs is swayed between nationalism and accommodationism. At one time he participated the Niagara Movement led by W.E.B. DuBois, however, in his novels he sides with Booker T. Washington. As a priest he naturally tended to be conservative. As Wilson Jeremiah Moses points out, "in the novels of Griggs, we observe many of the themes that characterized black bourgeois nationalism during the nineteenth century . . . " ⁽²¹⁾ His priesthood was sponsored by white middle class, and therefore, the term "the bourgeois nationalism" is the term that aptly describes his novels as well as those of other authors of the age. Robert A. Bone points out:

Sutton Griggs' vacillation between one pole which is militant and fantastic and another pole which is realistic and accommodationist faithfully reflects the political dilemma of the Negro intellectual prior to World War I. The ideological contradictions which plagued Griggs were not personal but historical. He and others of his generation were caught in an iron vise which preHis mulatto heroes and heroines are presisely the symbol of his thought.

NOTES

- 1) Wilson Jermiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* (Connecticut, Archon Books, 1978) pp.192-193.
- 2) Sutton E. Griggs, The Hindered Hand (reprint. New York, AMS Press, 1969) p.287.
- 3) *Ibid.* p.292.
- 4) *Ibid.* pp.293-297.
- 5) *Ibid.* p.292.
- 6) Stering Brown, Negro Poetry and Drama and The Negro in American Fiction (New York, Atheneum, 1972) p.101.
- 7) Sutton E. Griggs, Pointing the Way (reprint. New York, AMS Press, 1974) pp.227 225.
- 8) Ibid., p.233.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p.19.
- 10) Ibid., p.21.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p.47.
- 12) Ibid., p.75.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p.80.
- Hugh M. Gloster, Negro Voices in American Fiction (New York, Russell & Russell, 1945)
 p.66.
- Arthur P. Davis and Saunders Redding, ed., *Cavalcade* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) p.163.
- 16) Sutton E. Griggs, Overshadowed (reprint. New York, AMS Press, 1973) pp.65-66.
- 17) Pointing the Way, op. cit., p.218.
- 18) Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (reprint. New York, Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969) p.232.
- 19) Overshadowed, op. cit., p.127.
- 20) Pointing the Way, op. cit., p.99.
- 21) Moses, op. cit., p.173.
- 22) Robert A. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1958) p.34.