
thetized himself against the injustice and stupidity he saw in his middle-class world by creating a literature of ironic, aloof disdain.

Barnes, professor of humanities at the University of Colorado, places all four volumes of *The Family Idiot* in the context of Sartre's larger intellectual career and measures them against other treatments of Flaubert. Good at detecting points where Sartre twists the evidence to suit his own elaborate theories (a fusion of existentialism and Marxism), Barnes judges *The Family Idiot* a fitting conclusion to the philosopher's life-long meditation on questions of history, art, human dignity, and freedom.

**BLACK MESSIAHS AND
UNCLE TOMS: Social and
Literary Manipulations of a
Religious Myth**

by Wilson Jeremiah Moses
Pa. State Univ., 1982
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Throughout their history, Americans have seen themselves as a "redeemer people." This messianism has fueled belief in a sacred right to territorial expansion as well as a humbler commitment to the protection of "inalienable" human rights. But not all messianic visions in America involve national destiny, writes Moses, professor of Afro-American studies at Brown University. Oppressed groups, particularly blacks, have often viewed their own kind as God's chosen people. In the ante-bellum era, black ministers such as Methodist Richard Allen cited scriptures to show that slavery was God's way of tempering those whom he would soon raise up. Martin Luther King, Jr., later summoned the same spirit when he preached that "the Negro may be God's appeal to this age—an age drifting rapidly to its doom." Some whites, too, have seized on this image. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom" (a character frequently misinterpreted as a lackey, contends Moses) exemplifies the notion of blacks as Christ-like "suffering servants." Though occasionally exploited by con artists, the theme of black messianism has been good for the nation's blacks, Moses maintains. Adapting the myth of divine favor to a history of deprivation has helped them reconcile their sense of separateness with the faith that they are "truly American."