

*Finger Lakes Bookman***The Negro Speaks**

By Dr. William R. Lansberg

Librarian

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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Whenever a thoughtful, perceptive and articulate writer like Robert Penn Warren turns to the most important domestic problem in America today—the Negro Revolution—it behooves us all to take heed. In his latest volume, "Who Speaks for the Negro?" (Random House, 5.95), he gives us perhaps the finest recent book on the subject.

This is not Warren's first book in this field; nine years ago, he wrote a little volume of only 66 pages, which is still in print: "Segregation—the Inner Conflict in the South" (Random House, —\$1.95; paperbound, \$1.10). Highly praised by reviewers, it offered a survey of Southern opinion, both white and Negro, "on the furiously argued question of racial segregation"—as one reviewer commented.

Novelist, poet and Southerner—Kentucky born—Warren is well qualified to explore both sides of the situation. In many respects, "Who Speaks for the Negro?" might be considered an expansion of the first, brief volume—with the added benefits of almost a decade of reflection on the subject, the many important events that have occurred during that period, and, of course, the advantages of a much bigger book (454 pages).

Warren himself tells us what he is trying to do in these words:

"I have written this book because I wanted to find out something, first hand, about the people, some of them anyway, who are making the Negro Revolution what it is—one of the dramatic events of the American story.

"This book is not a history, a sociological analysis, an anthropological study, or a Who's Who of the Negro Revolution. It is a record of my attempt to find out what I could find out. It is primarily a transcript of conversations, with settings and commentaries. That is, I want to make my reader see, hear and feel as immediately as possible what I saw, heard and felt

"The interviews were recorded on tape. In almost all instances the person interviewed checked the transcript for errors. Many of the interviews were long, sometimes several hours, and in a few cases there was more than one conversation. It would have been impossible, and undesirable, to publish all the transcripts. I have chosen the sections which seem to me most significant and exciting"

All this may not be entirely fair to our author: actually, there is a lot of himself in the book—his own feelings, his own comments on both the issues involved and the personalities he interviews.

Most of his book is divided into four chapters on current Negro leaders: in Mississippi; among the "Big Brass"; on the "Periphery"—the prominent writers, professional and business men who, we might say, exercise their influence from the edges of the main conflict; and, finally, the Young—who will provide the future leadership.

The chapter on the Big Brass is by far the largest section of the book, with the following cast of characters: Adam Clayton Powell (for 20 years Congressman from Harlem, and now Chairman of the powerful House Committee on Education and Labor); Roy Wilkins (President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — better known as the NAACP); Whitney M. Young, Jr. (Executive Director of the Urban League); James Forman (Executive Secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—SNCC or "Snick"); James L. Farmer (founder and National Director of the Committee of Racial Equality—CORE); Dr. Martin Luther King (principal figure in the 1955-56 bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala.—which might be called the Lexington and Concord of the Negro Revolution, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, winner last year of the Nobel Peace Prize—he gave the cash award of approximately \$54,000 to the civil rights movement); Bayard Rustin (Deputy Director of the March on Washington in 1963); and Malcolm X (originally one of the top leaders of the Black Muslims, he broke away from the main movement under Elijah Muhammad, and—on Sunday, February 20, 1965—was assassinated in Harlem, allegedly by Muhammad's Muslims).

On all of these figures, Robert Penn Warren gives us the story of their lives, their careers, their beliefs and their philosophy on the Negro movement. In the following passage, for example, he catches almost the exact moment when a great leader was born:

"For the first two months, King showed no hint of the greatness to come—except, perhaps, to a few who were already falling under his spell.

"Then, on the night of January 30, 1965, his house was bombed. It happened while he was away at a mass meeting, but his wife and children were there. By the time he reached the house, a crowd of Negroes had gathered, angry and muttering as the police tried to clear the lawn and street. Dr. King appeared on the porch and began to speak: 'He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword'"