The Negro Speaks

By Dr. William R. Lansberg
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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 behoves us all to take heed. In his latest volume, "Who Speaks for the Negro?" (Little, 30, approximately $54,000 to $60,000), 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 published "Who Shall Speak for the Segregation—The Inner Conflict in the South" (Random House, 1956; paperbound, $1.10). Highly praised by reviewers, it offered a survey of Southern opinion, both white and Negro, and, the reviewer commented, "Warren himself tells us what he is trying to do in the course of the first, brief volume. He is, indeed, most of all a man of ideas, with almost a dozen of them. He has made a record of his attempt to find out what he could find out about the people, and, in many cases, there was more than one conversation. It would have been impossible, and undesirable, to publish all the interviews. So there are significant and exciting commentaries. That is, I want to make my reader see, hear and feel as immediately as possible what I saw, heard and felt.

The comments on both the issues involved and the personalities make 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 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."

"I have written this book because I wanted to find out something new about the people of color; anyway, who are making the Negro Revolution what it is."

Most of his book is divided into four chapters on current Negro leaders: in Mississippi; among the "Big Brass"; 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 (20 years Congressman from Harlem, and now Chairman of the powerful House Committee on Education and Labor); James L. Farmer (founder and National Director of the CORE); Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Executive Director of the SCLC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee); Whitney M. Young, Jr. (Executive Director of the Urban League); James E. Banks (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, Jr. (principal figure in the 1955-56 bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala.—which might be called the Lexington and Concord of the Negro Revolution); Mr. and Mrs. Robert Penn Warren (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Two of the characters in this book—Terrence - 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 Warren himself tells us what he is trying to do in the course, the advantages of a much bigger book (454 pages). With the added 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 (494 pages).

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