Robert Penn Warren, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Southerner, a one-time apologist for segregation, a long-time colleague of the old agrarian romantics and a sometime friend of countless white supremacists and even Dixiecrats, has written a new book which is perhaps the very best inside report on the Negro civil rights movement by anyone so far. In spite of several ridiculous flaws, which are much more characteristic of certain New York indoor intellectuals than of the worldly, realistic and thoughtful son of a hard-headed old Kentucky dirt farmer, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* deserves the widest possible circulation.

The title is misleading. This is not only a book about current U.S. Negro leaders and spokesmen. It is really a book about the fundamentals of citizenship which the author, a major novelist, poet and critic, compiled from a series of taped interviews and interspersed with his own reactions and commentary. It is also by far the most comprehensive treatment of the complex issues in the civil rights controversy on record. On the whole, it is also the most objective. But even when it is intensely personal, its accuracy is seldom compromised. Indeed, it achieves its greatest reliability through the very frankness with which it indulges in introspection.

It is as if Jack Burden, the self-searching Southern reporter-press agent, the narrator of *All The King’s Men*, Warren’s prize-winning novel of some 19 years ago, had finally gone back into the newspaper business. At the end of the sequence of sordid and sanguinary events which climaxed that hard-boiled story about power politics in a Southern state, Burden holed up in one of those beautiful but haunted ante bellum mansions to finish a book about one of his Confederate ancestors. He had always had a very special personal urge to come to terms with the past. In fact, the book he was working on had actually started out as a dissertation for a PhD in History. But even as he wrote he knew very well that soon now he would have to “go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of time.”

It was inevitable that this responsibility, awful or magnificent, would require a truly serious and sensitive Southerner to confront the obvious fact that Negroes are a major force which determines much if not most of the convulsion in his immediate region of the world. The majority of Southerners, sensitive or not, come to realize this in some way or other sooner or later. Too many other Americans never do.

In the special case of Jack Burden, his very sense of history would eventually lead him to realize that his destiny had always been inextricably entangled with that of the Negroes all around him.

At any rate, in *Who Speaks for the Negro?* Robert Penn Warren himself turns out to be just the sort of All-American star reporter-commentator one had hoped his training and experience had prepared Jack Burden to become. As a matter of fact, few present-day newsmen can touch him. The writing is much more than first-rate journalism. At its best it has many of the finest qualities of good fiction: strong narrative progression, carefully observed and rendered detail, roundness and mystery of character, a mature awareness of the enigmatic complexity of human motives, and a fine sense of the texture of human life itself.

Warren is always at his best when he works with the disciplines of the novelist. He is least reliable when he allows himself to be sucked in by the all too neat theories of this or that social science; then he sounds like a reading-room intellectual. He wastes entirely too much time, for instance, fumbling around with Stanley Elkins’ classroom theories about Samboism (sic!). When he sits listening to Charles Evers telling about the heroic pact between himself and his martyred brother Medgar, the novelist in him spots the almost too pat rhetorical dynamics, even as he accepts the truth of what is being said. Not so, however, when some postulating head shrinker wraps his rhetoric about Sambo archetypes in the jargon of psychiatry! He also lets the cocktail party theorists fake him into making glib speculations which would reduce music, dance, sports and even robust sexuality to questionnable assets. Do these writers ever wonder how they sound to Negroes? Negroes think all of these things are wonderful. They are not the least bit interested in giving them up. They want to add other things to them.

A remarkable quality about Warren the interviewer, on the other hand, is his unique lack of condescension. He accepts his people for what they are, tries to understand them, records their opinions as faithfully as possible whether he agrees with them or not, never presumes, never attempts to browbeat. Thus his subjects come through as significant human beings engaged in a very serious controversy, and his book is a dependable source of first-hand information about almost every aspect of the Negro Revolution. It also
One of England's top best sellers for 1965, this is a solid, beautifully written biography of H. H. Asquith, British Prime Minister during the crucial years 1908-1916. It is packed with vivid stories of political maneuverings involving such vital personalities as Lloyd George, Churchill, Balfour, Chamberlain, and Bonar Law. Asquith seemed politically indestructible, but his fall in late 1916 was sudden and seemed politically indestructible, but his fall in late 1916 was sudden. His successor is still alive.

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a long way to go. But like an increasing number of Southerners, among them Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, Hugo Black of Alabama, and Ralph McGill of Georgia, he is much farther along than many damnyankees, including some black ones, who think they are there already.

Pretension Without Content
THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE
By Rajo Rao
Macmillan. 117 pp. $3.95.
THE GAME OF DOSTOEVSKY
By Samuel Astrachan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 214 pp. $4.95.
Reviewed by DANIEL CURLEY
Author, "A Stone Man, Yes"

The Cat and Shakespeare is like a novel written by one of the Indian characters in A Passage to India. It is not, however, written by Dr. Aziz, who is capable of ranging words "coldly on shelves." Nor is it written by Professor Godbole, who manages to keep even his greatest enigmas in touch with Western intelligence. It is not even written by Mr. Das, who is just barely able to keep order in the courtroom by the greatest of all possible efforts. No, it is written by Mrs. Bhattacharya, that charming lady who invites you to her house, laughing and enticing, and who, when you get there at the appointed time, is not at home, has never from the beginning intended to be at home.

The story is narrated by Ramakrishna Pai, a minor official at the Revenue Board. His work has taken him away from his native place, and his wife has chosen to remain behind with the children, a choice that Mr. Pai finds rather to his liking, for he has discovered that his wife is really unsympathetic. She insists that two and two always make four. She will admit that in dreams the answer is often seven, but she says, "I am not living in a dream." Ramakrishna Pai rather thinks he is living in a dream, and he is so fortunate as to find a really womanly woman who is very bad at arithmetic. In the course of the book, this woman bears his son, and they seem to live happily ever after, although the technicalities and legalities of the situation must continue to perplex the Western mind haunted by dreams of the most precise kind of arithmetic.

More important, however, than this idyl is the character of Govindan Nair, neighbor and best friend to Ramakrishna Pai. Govindan Nair is a mystic and perhaps a confidence