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SPEAKING FOR THE NEGRO

By PAUL M. GASTON

RETURNING from a civil rights meeting this summer, a man I know picked up a copy of Playboy magazine, searching for relaxation in a world of fantasy far removed from the disturbing realities of race relations. Having rested his eyes on the pictures, he turned to the fiction section. The story he read was set in Mississippi. The final seduction scene took place while civil rights workers were being abducted and, presumably, murdered. The story was not a very good one but its existence underscores a point: civil rights literature has become about as pervasive as the civil rights movement itself. Indeed, out of last summer's turmoil have come at least fifty books on the subject. Seven of those books are under review here. The sampling is representative in at least two respects: quality is extremely uneven, and emphasis is heavy on Mississippi.

The nation's confrontation with Mississippi was long in coming. Briefly in the headlines during the 1961 summer of "Freedom Rides," Mississippi pre-empted attention in September, 1962, when James Meredith was enrolled at Ole Miss. The spotlight has burned brightly on the state ever since. Two of the books here considered deal with the beginning of the confrontation in the Meredith case, Russell H. Barrett's "Integration at Ole Miss," and Walter Lord's "The Past That Would Not Die." Mr. Barrett is a professor of political science at Ole Miss. Like James W. Silver, whose "Mississippi: The Closed Society" made best seller lists in

Integration at Ole Miss. By Russell H. Barrett. Quadrangle Books. \$4.95. *The Past That Would Not Die.* By Walter Lord. Harper & Row. \$4.95. "I Do So Politely": *A Voice from the South.* By Robert Canzoneri. Houghton Mifflin Company. \$4.00. *Mississippi: The Long, Hot Summer.* By William McCord. W. W. Norton & Company. \$4.50. *Letters from Mississippi.* Edited by Elizabeth Sutherland. McGraw-Hill Book Company. \$4.95. *The Free Men.* By John Ehle. Harper & Row. \$5.95. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. \$5.95.

1964, he was one of the few faculty members who gave aid and support to Mr. Meredith.

With painstaking care, Mr. Barrett takes us from Meredith's application for admission in January, 1961, through the weird legal maneuvers that followed, to the night of violence in September, 1962, and concludes with an invaluable account of the integration of the University since that time. Here we have the story, not widely known, of how Meredith fared as a student and, even less well known, of the quieter events that brought three more Negroes to Ole Miss. By January, 1965, Mr. Barrett tells us, the University was well on the way to recovery: the loss of both students and faculty, which hurt badly, was overcome; two Negroes were in residence, pursuing their studies peacefully, and a chastened University community was adjusting hopefully to a new era. "Mississippians as well as other Americans can learn from adversity," Mr. Barrett tells us. "Although they may not like the road they must follow, in increasing numbers they know what the road is."

The focus of Mr. Barrett's volume is largely on Mississippi and the University. (It is, incidentally, a superb study of an institution in crisis.) Walter Lord, on the other hand, largely ignores the internal struggle at the University and attempts to tell the story by painting a larger picture. He is considerably less successful in his effort. The difficulty does not lie in the scope of his work (chapters on Mississippi history, the Negro Revolution, the Justice Department, the Kennedy Administration) but in the approach. The style is breezy and marred by unfortunate passages (for example, of Martin Luther King: "... integration ran in his veins"). The treatment is largely unanalytical, and controversial points, carefully elucidated by Barrett, are treated with unwarranted certitude. His central thesis, introduced in the painfully oversimplified historical chapters, is that Mississippi was trapped by her past, that the events of 1962 were somehow a second civil war, inevitable because of the nature

of the handling of the first. "A hundred years of build-up—capped by these last three days of feverish rhetoric—had done their work," we are told, with the result that the "state's people were out of control. . . ."

Mr. Lord, like some other recent writers, is convinced that Mississippi is profoundly different from the rest of America, not just in its veneer, but in its basic system of values. He believes, for example, that Mississippians do not subscribe to the concept of the brotherhood of man and informs us that "Mississippi and the rest of the country no longer operate on the same basic premises. . . . The state and the nation have drifted so far apart that there's simply no bridge of ideas between them." There is, of course, a kind of truth here. But to argue that bestiality toward Negroes and white civil rights workers bespeaks a total moral and intellectual rift with the rest of the nation is to mislead badly. As William Faulkner has told us so many times, the Mississippi system, however barbarous it may be, is the expression of evils common to mankind. To Aaron Henry, a Mississippi Negro leader who knows that system first hand, "Mississippi is a mutation of America." And one of the civil rights workers warned Robert Canzoneri "not to think of Mississippi as foreign. It isn't foreign, he said; it is where an American disease has come to a head, so that we can see it. But the poison is in us all. . . ."

Mr. Canzoneri grasps the point. His little book, "I Do So Politely," is a memoir of uneven value, but its merit lies in the attempt to look at the Mississippi problem as something other than a freakish phenomenon. Born and reared in Mississippi, a first-cousin-once-removed to Ross Barnett, Mr. Canzoneri has taught in public schools and colleges in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Kentucky. When he read that cousin Ross, backed by the grim and uncompromising force of the state, personally denied Meredith admission to the University and at the end remarked, "I do so politely," he had not only the title for a book, but a theme as well. The

theme, one regrets, is not developed systematically, for Mr. Canzoneri has not written a systematic book, but we are convincingly shown that the trouble with Mississippians is their extraordinary ability to delude themselves: to say one thing, and do or mean another. We are told of his students who can "read through the 'Essay on Man,' or Emerson's 'Self-Reliance,' or Henley's 'I am the captain of my fate,' or Bryant's 'Thanatopsis,' and come out with an orthodox Baptist sermon as a paraphrase." We are also reminded of Mississippian Eudora Welty's explanation of how people cope with displeasing truths: "Down here," she says, "we say, 'Well! I've never seen anybody like her in my whole life!' But up East they say, 'I know exactly what her trouble is.'"

How to make Mississippi face the world as it really is—that problem remained as formidable after the Meredith affair as before. Meredith himself, Mr. Barrett tells us, did not blame the students who tormented him. "They are doing what the system tells them to do," he said, "and it is the system that has to be changed." To "change the system" by confronting Mississippians with a plethora of "realities" was the objective of COFO, the loose federation of the major civil rights groups that invaded and occupied Mississippi in the summer of 1964. Before the season was out there had been a staggering number of arrests, shootings, beatings, bombings, church burnings, and murders. The record of violence, elaborately documented, gives a gruesome tone to William McCord's "Mississippi: The Long, Hot Summer." Professor McCord, a Stanford social scientist, was on the scene throughout the summer and his book, despite some shortcomings, is the most comprehensive and balanced account we have of the Mississippi Summer.

Violence stunned the nation and, Mr. McCord writes, ultimately shocked many in Mississippi as well, thus laying the tenuous foundation for a movement of native white moderates. The various COFO projects—in education, politics, and community development—also resulted in "an impres-

sive record of progress," we are told. That the changes were slight, and the distance to go great, is Mr. McCord's conclusion, best expressed by a legend inscribed on the wall at COFO headquarters: "Lord, we ain't what we wanna be—we ain't what we gonna be—but, thank God, we ain't what we was."

To many, both in and out of Mississippi, the most novel feature of COFO was the presence of hundreds of volunteers, mostly young white college students from the non-South. Seen as an act of nobility and dedication by many, their participation enraged and puzzled white Mississippians. Mr. McCord stresses the friendships which developed between the Negro veterans and their Northern allies and finds that it was "this ordinary form of friendship between whites and blacks which most infuriated the segregationists." There was, however, another aspect of the relationship which McCord does not elucidate: a definite, though often subtle, sense of friction and alienation developed within the ranks. It has been augmenting since the end of the 1964 summer and is now assuming the proportions of an ominous, though amorphous, threat to the civil rights movement.

Some glimmering of the tensions between the two groups can be seen in the hundreds of letters written by the Northern volunteers, now published as "Letters from Mississippi," edited by Elizabeth Sutherland. This extremely interesting volume answers several questions largely untouched by McCord. For one thing, it is clear that the great majority of the volunteers were not, as Mississippians declared, far-out leftists, divorced from the mainstream of American life. Overwhelmingly, they came from respectable middle and upper-middle class families and large numbers of them were impelled by the same religious commitments and national ideals that inspire lower class Negroes. Some remained to work in Mississippi after the summer was over; others, thoroughly "Snickized," brought their new concern and insights back to their campuses. Their emotions ran the gamut from

serene optimism to bitter frustration, but in most of them we see a growing maturity and a profound grasp of the complexities of the problem they faced. One of the volunteers, writing after he had returned to New York, lamented that everyone, wanting to know "what was it like?" demanded a "nice handy three-word phrase to be able to repeat to neighbors. . . . And I grope to find words to explain what it was like—but can't."

What may lie ahead for Mississippi—and the civil rights movement as a whole—cannot easily be predicted, but John Ehle's superb book, "The Free Men," should be read thoughtfully for clues. Mr. Ehle tells the story of the virtually unreported civil rights turmoil that gripped Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1963 and 1964. Home of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill is famed for its liberalism, Southern style, and was an unlikely place for the events described by Mr. Ehle. The University had many Negro students, several lunch counters and restaurants were desegregated, the police chief was a model of integrity and good judgment, the city administration was in liberal hands, and the school board was proud of its desegregation record. Yet when a small group of young people, dissatisfied with the "tokenism" which they felt characterized Chapel Hill, launched a movement for total desegregation of all public facilities, the community was unable to cope. There were extraordinary displays of civil disobedience, mass arrests, grossly unfair trials, and imprisonment and exile for the leaders. Intrinsically interesting, the Chapel Hill story is relevant to the rest of the South today for several reasons. One is that a split developed between radicals and liberals, shattering the liberal alliance that had accounted for previous progress in race relations. One wonders if this is a forecast of things to come elsewhere. There are signs that it may be. If so, we need to understand thoroughly the young militants in the forefront today. One of the major virtues of Mr. Ehle's book is the insight it gives into the young radicals who led the Chapel

Hill movement. His portrait is certainly one of the most penetrating yet to appear.

The radical-liberal split, in embryonic form only now, is but one indication of the increasing complexity and fragmentation of the civil rights movement. To ask "Who Speaks for The Negro?" as Robert Penn Warren does in his most recent book, is to pose one of the most important questions one can ask today. The reply to the question cannot be summarized or capsulized, partly because there is no single answer. Traveling through the South, and visiting several major Northern cities as well, Warren interviewed scores of Negro leaders from the best known to the virtually unknown. The record of these conversations makes up this book, a rich and rewarding documentary. Warren found what many may regard as a surprising lack of agreement over the direction, control, and aims of the civil rights movement, but in a final chapter of reflection he makes it unmistakably clear that leaders of the Negro revolution "are in business for the long pull" and he pleads for a new and greater attention to the difficulties that lie ahead.

FLAWS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION SYSTEM

BY LOUIS W. KOENIG

THE American political system relies upon elaborate dispersals of power to avoid the hazards of inadequate consensus and overreaching ambition. Nowhere is power more dispersed than in the processes by which nominations are made for the Presidency. The Presidential primary, the national convention, the multitude of autonomous state and local party organizations, the in-built encouragements of competitors for the great prize, assure a contested, developing consensus in which many units of power share.

How They Became President: Thirty-five Ways to the White House. By Rexford G. Tugwell. Simon and Schuster. \$8.95. *The Making of the President—1964.* By Theodore H. White. Atheneum Publishers. \$6.95.