

The Negroes' Many Voices

—What Are They Saying?

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE NEGRO? By Robert Penn Warren. 454 pp. New York: Random House. \$5.95.

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Who speaks for the Negro?

The one person who doesn't is the white Northerner who gave \$10 to the NAACP or the white Southerner who "knows" the Negro as a mammy, a maid, or a yardman — although he comes close to it as an anonymous white turnkey in Jackson, Miss., who told the jailed freedom - riders with tears in his eyes, "I can't go along with the trouble you caused me, but you're still human beings."

WHO SPEAKS? In one sense, of course, it is the heads of the various organizations like Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, the late Malcolm X of the Muslims, or James Forman of Snick; in another, the writers like Baldwin and Ellison, community men like Judge Hastie or Dr. Kenneth Clark or USIA Director Carl Rowan; or it could be the barely known, barely literate Rev. Joe Carter of Mississippi who continues to want to "red-ish" to vote.

They speak, they and all the many others whose tape-recorded conversations with Mr. Warren from '63 to '65 make up the bulk of this book, and they certainly are representative of the various attitudes and different approaches of the Negro people. Each of them can be said to speak for Negroes.

HOWEVER, in a real sense, each of these is bound by the tactical and other limits of their situations. And so, in the end, it is Mr. Warren who speaks for the Negro—not for

the Negro as an advocate speaks, although he believes in their real emancipation, and not as a representative, since he can't be—but as a summer-up of the various colloquies, as a clarifier of differences, as a fellow human being aware with the novelist's awareness of the complexities of the human relationship, knowledgeable of the emotional stab and sensitive of the intellectual flare, and

finally as one who can put the individual events within the larger framework of the facts and ideals of Western civilization.

Neither is so valuable as both together, the various Negro spokesmen and Mr. Warren. When we are finished with his book, although we may not, will not know Negroes, we do—and about this I have no doubt—know the Negro.