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REVIEWS

Who Speaks for the Negro? By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. \$5.95.

Mississippi Black Paper. Foreword by Reinhold Niebuhr, introduction by Hodding Carter III. Random House. \$1.95.

Adam Clayton Powell and the Politics of Race. By Neil Hickey and Ed Edwin. Fleet Publishing Corporation. \$6.50.

Manchild in the Promised Land. By Claude Brown. Macmillan. \$5.95.

Since the Supreme Court's landmark school-desegregation decision in 1954, literature on America's racial problems has proliferated at an ever-increasing rate. Especially since the so-called Negro Revolution moved into its "second phase," involving sit-ins, freedom rides, demonstrations, and other forms of direct action, dating from about 1960, has curiosity and concern mounted. The spate of books and articles published in the wake of Birmingham, riots at Ole Miss, the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act clearly indicate that the Negro Revolution has "arrived" in the public consciousness. The books reviewed here are among the more significant recent contributions to this literature.

Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?* is one of the most interesting and substantial contributions to this literature that this reviewer has seen for some time. It is another illustration of the ability of a sensitive novelist and poet to probe the subtle dimensions of complex human problems better than many social scientists armed with bloodless abstractions.

Warren first approached the subject of race in an essay published in 1930 in *I'll Take My Stand*, the manifesto of the southern agrarian movement centered at Vanderbilt University. Here he viewed segregation as capable of being basically a humane institution, and stressed the need for the Negro's economic independence as a means of achieving a workable separate but equal society. He now admits this was an idealized view, written while he was in England and removed from immediate contact with the problem. In 1956 Warren returned to the South to write a brief but penetrating essay titled *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South*, based on interviews with a widely varied group of Southerners of both races, laced together with Warren's insightful comments.

The same technique is used on a more elaborate scale in the present book. His stated purpose is "to find out something, first hand, about the people, some of them anyway, who are making the Negro Revolution what it is." He conducted extensive interviews with a large number of Negro leaders, north and south, including both "the big brass" (Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Adam Powell, James Farmer, Malcolm X, *et al.*) and "leadership from the periphery" (Judge William Hastie, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Carl Rowan, *et al.*). He also includes chapters on Mississippi and the 1964 summer project, and on attitudes of Negro youth, based on similar interviews. Much of the book is a verbatim record of the most significant portions of Warren's interviews. They are tied together by his comments and analysis, forming a coherent whole rather than talks set down seriatim. His eye for subtlety, nuance, and shadings of meaning comes through again and again, making the difference between a book of this kind written by a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, and one written by an ordinary journalist.

Warren's interviews are generally free-wheeling and relatively unstructured. Certain questions are brought out in all of them — the Negro's quest for identity, non-violence, the role of whites in the Negro movement, the use and abuse of demonstrations, bussing pupils in northern ghettos, and so on. To elicit reactions, he repeatedly cites to his subjects Dr. Kenneth Clark's psychological criticism of Martin Luther King's doctrines of non-violence, W. E. B. DuBois' characterization of the Negro as a split psyche, Gunnar Myrdal's views on what Reconstruction should have been (he would have compensated former slave owners, among other things), the ration-

ale of slogans like "Freedom Now" — and other aptly chosen themes.

The richness and variety of the responses defy summarization. They reveal substantial diversity within the civil rights leadership on practically all major questions. The book richly demonstrates that the Negro Revolution is far from a monolithic movement. Views range from the sophisticated socio-political realism of the leaders of the older established organizations to the disciplined spirituality of Dr. King, to the vague idealism of those for whom activism, struggle, and total commitment become ends in themselves. There are significant differences of emphasis in the goals that are stressed — from racial justice in the context of prevailing social norms to the use of civil rights as the opening wedge in a massive program of radical social change. Differences emerge on the Negro's need for self-improvement. Where Roy Wilkins calls for Negroes to act to put down crime and vandalism, and Martin Luther King calls for a Negro "Operation Bootstrap" in a desegregated society, others say, in effect, that it is not the Negro who must change his standards but that those of white middle class society must be drastically altered. (Warren sees a dangerous confusion of the concepts of congenital inferiority and of de facto inferiority in the views of some radical integrationists on this question.) Nor do Negro leaders agree on what society should look like upon consummation of their revolution. These carefully articulated divergencies, taken as a whole, underscore the intellectual force and integrity that come through in most of the interviews.

Warren's careful drawing out of diverse viewpoints of Negro leaders is keenly important for understanding the future course of the civil rights movement as well as its present shape. He eschews prophecy on this score, and offers little discussion of the organizational and political aspects of the movement, but he provides a body of data that is bound to generate provocative questions.

Warren's concluding chapter touches on a number of fundamental issues. He is, on the whole, very favorably impressed with both the intellectual and moral quality of Negro leadership. Throughout the book, however, the reader senses a muted concern about the problems of power — the temptation of the holders of new-found power to "over-reach"; the degeneration of a justified sense of outrage and moral superiority into an overweening, possibly fatal, pride. Similar concerns are voiced more explicitly in

his conclusion. He clearly dissociates himself from the stand-pat clichés that attitudes cannot be legislated, or that desegregation cannot (or should not) be forced by law, but he is disturbed about the danger of overstating the role of force in securing Negro rights. He observes that "It is all too easy to call for force; it is sometimes hard to know how to pick up the pieces afterwards." He might have added that extremes breed extremes (which helps to explain some of the more questionable tactics of the civil rights movement), and that radical revolution may produce Thermidorian reaction rather than reconciliation.

He also questions the lack of encouragement of "responsible localism" and the increasing centralization of power consequent on the Negro's understandable demands for federally sponsored solutions. This is not the Confederate war cry of states rights à la Calhoun; Warren seems to favor with some enthusiasm most of the federal actions that have been taken. This seems rather a note of caution and concern voiced by one who does not share the apparently fashionable view that the strictures of Jefferson and Lord Acton are anachronistic. Perhaps a Southerner is in a peculiarly favorable position to appreciate the corruptibility of unchecked power — he inherits the sorry memory of Reconstruction, on the one hand, and on the other he knows in his inner being that under Jim Crow the powerless Negro is inevitably brutalized. In any case, the machinery of centralized power may be used later for purposes other than those intended; there is perhaps a legitimate fear that civil rights can be over-legislated into the matrix for a police state.

Finally, Warren exposes the most common forms of sentimentality in viewing the race question. The mainspring of sentimentality is vanity, Warren says, and this is an unreliable basis for a social movement. His catalog of sentimental fallacies will discomfit many pious and well-meaning fellow travellers of the civil rights movement, and would probably generate some controversy among leaders as well. Every self-professed white liberal, in particular, should read this debunking of several common stereotypes.

Mississippi Black Paper is a collection of fifty-seven statements and notarized affidavits concerning incidents of alleged police brutality and official lawlessness in Mississippi. Many of those involved were participants in the Mississippi summer project of 1964. The statements included were selected from among 257 such declarations

filed in support of a Federal Court lawsuit to have federal marshals appointed to oversee Mississippi's local law enforcement. The accounts are tersely written, without comment or excessive elaboration.

This reviewer lacked the stomach to read through all fifty-seven statements. They are sickening indictments of Mississippi law enforcement. Perhaps the most typical reaction to these papers would be a whopping Orwellian "hate" directed at Mississippi. Yet this leaves us bereft of much needed understanding. This is admittedly Mississippi at its worst. There is a need, not so much for "the other side," since no justification can possibly be provided for the acts described in this book, but for some understanding of the total context of these events and the prospects for redemption of this society. A Foreword by Reinhold Niebuhr and an Introduction by Hodding Carter III, of the Greenville, Mississippi *Delta Democrat Times*, offer a few reflections on this theme. Niebuhr expresses horrified outrage, and suggests that only the larger community (presumably meaning the federal government) can save Mississippi. Carter's introduction is less shrill and has traces of irony which reflect his living close to the problem over a period of time. He attributes Mississippi's "summer of shame" to the silence of good men — the reluctance of respectable citizens to take a firm stand, not against segregation, but against rank lawlessness. He cites various hopeful signs (including the effects of the 1964 Civil Rights Act) which indicate that Mississippi's climate is improving, that the summer of 1964 was probably the low point for the state. Moderate voices are belatedly beginning to be heard.

White Mississippians, above all others, should read this book. Its principal asset is its shock value, and these are the people who most need to be shocked. It could be argued that the allegations in this book may be exaggerated, that some of these claims would be put in a different light under cross-examination, that these acts were provoked by the invasion of the state by meddling agitators and assorted beatniks. If all this were granted, the moral massiveness of these testimonies is only very slightly reduced. This book underscores the point that in a state like Mississippi the ultimate price of bitter-end resistance to desegregation is loss of law and order.

In an interview with Robert Penn Warren, Adam Clayton Powell noted that two-thirds of the Negroes in America live in the north. Powell also claims that the Negro revolution in the South is pri-

marily a middle class phenomenon, whereas in the north it is more of a mass movement. Many Negro leaders would dispute this, but most see key differences in the two situations. Several Negroes suggested to Warren that there was more hope for a meaningful racial accommodation in the South than in the North.

The political dimensions of the Northern Negro community are effectively illustrated in a new biography of Adam Clayton Powell. Neil Hickey and Ed Edwin, two experienced journalists, have produced a thoroughly competent political biography of the flamboyant Harlem Congressman — *Adam Clayton Powell and the Politics of Race*. It is a well-researched and objective account of Powell's career.

Powell's rise to prominence against the background of Harlem during the depression and early war years is traced. He became pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church (succeeding his father), wrote an influential newspaper column (which leaned far left until the Moscow trials and the Hitler-Stalin pact), and was elected to the New York City Council in this period. He was a leader of Negro protest movements and was associated with several gains made by Negroes among some of the city's larger employers. He was elected to Congress in 1944. His turbulent career is dispassionately traced — his tiffs with the DAR and with Harry and Bess Truman, his tax troubles, his attempts to move in on Puerto Rican politics and nudge Munoz Marin, Tammany's attempted purge, his uneasy relations with other Negro leaders and his moves toward an embrace of Malcolm X, his feuds with J. Raymond Jones over politics and with Dr. Kenneth Clark over control of the HARYOU-ACT program, and, of course, his well-publicized junkets and strained relations with Congressional colleagues. A high point in Powell's career was attainment of the chairmanship of the House Committee on Education and Labor in 1961, a position which has enabled him to have an important role in shaping several major pieces of legislation. The authors demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the political environment in which Powell has acted, including the tacit institutional norms of the House of Representatives and the tangled morass of New York City Democratic politics.

Powell emerges as neither saint nor devil but as an intelligent and able politician whose power position is based on race as surely as Senator Bilbo's was. The authors' thesis is not a novel one, but

it is well developed and presented. Powell is viewed as a ghetto phenomenon, a leader who could voice the frustrations of the black masses, whose peccadillos and irresponsibilities provided those masses with vicarious satisfactions. They explain particularly well the psychological dynamics of Powell's mass appeal.

Powell has represented his district well, if election returns are indicative. In 1964 he did not campaign and yet won re-election over three opponents by a margin of more than ten-to-one. His effectiveness in reaching the rank and file of Harlem is evident when his Negro critics rally to his defense when he comes under attack from the white community. The authors imply that the Negro movement is passing Powell by, hence his denunciation of established civil rights organizations and his approaches to Malcolm X in an effort to win national prominence as a mass leader. Although he may be a product of an era that is ending, Powell repeatedly points out that the great masses of Negroes are not involved in or committed to any of the established civil rights organizations. The authors show how Powell has failed to become a nationally prominent mass leader; but if Powell has failed, so have all others thus far. Perhaps the successes of the civil rights movement will remove any need for such a leader; if not, the era of Powell-type politicians is not at all necessarily over.

Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* is an autobiographical account of growing up in Harlem. Brown is the son of a Southern sharecropper who has come north. He was born and brought up in Harlem and somehow manages to escape it and make good in the larger community. The book's dust jacket says that Brown recently graduated from Harvard University and is entering law school. This book is in many ways the most hopeful of this group.

Brown took to the streets at about the age of five. His first-person account, written in the argot of the streets, traces his growing up. He is precocious in the ways of the streets and shrewd in his understanding of the people there. He does everything (including getting shot) — fighting, stealing, gambling, narcotics, and the rest. He spends a term at the Wiltwyck School and three terms in reform school, where he was usually one of the leaders among the inmates.

When he gets out, he continues the same general pattern of life, still "on the street."

Somehow Brown manages to escape. He loves the teeming vitality and variety of Harlem, but senses its hopelessness and the dead end character of life on the streets. He gets out, moves to Greenwich Village, and ultimately succeeds in finding himself and a worthwhile life. It is hard to identify precisely the reasons that he moves out and eventually "makes it." The odds against it were overwhelming. He wants to avoid a criminal record; after sixteen he would have a "sheet" if caught on the wrong side of the law. His precocity was probably a factor, in that he earned the reputation of being tough at a very early age. Because of this, he did not need to go on heroin to prove that he was "hip" — he already had a "rep." (He records the tragic toll that heroin took in Harlem during the 1950s.) The encouragement of sympathetic teachers and counselors was perhaps a factor (the book is dedicated to the Wiltwyck Training School). Fear, too, played a part. Most of all, though, it was Brown himself, who comes through as an intelligent, ambitious, and compassionate person.

There is happily no special pleading or axe-grinding in this book. Brown does not feel sorry for himself nor does he manifest the fastidious alienation which is nowadays so fashionable to impute to ghetto dwellers. He is well aware of prejudice and discrimination but these are neither an obsession nor a psychological crutch. Brown is too human and too credible to be a black Horatio Alger; but his story does show that there may still be a little mileage in the much-debunked virtues of individual initiative. Although not written with this in mind, necessarily, the book is something of an antidote to the sentimental environmentalism that encourages the projection of all failings and shortcomings onto that great scapegoat, Society.

This book provides a fascinating portrayal of the sub-culture of the Harlem streets. Brown's account is natural and graphic, but he is more than a camera — he offers sensitive insights generated by keen intelligence and observation. This picture of the life of the Harlem masses is an effective complement to the Hickey-Edwin biography of Powell. Together they provide a cultural and political view of Harlem that is far more meaningful and reliable than the angry rhetoric of propagandists on either side.

The most fundamental goals of the Negro revolution have been achieved. The Court decisions and the legislation of recent years embody these achievements. Segregation vs. integration is no longer a real issue in any fundamental sense. To be sure, some tough mopping-up operations will have to be carried out in some areas, but the issue is no longer in doubt.

Many problems remain, and will remain for a long while. The continuing problems of creative adjustment to a desegregated society are numerous and complex. They are in many ways more subtle, less dramatic, less clear-cut in their moral implications (whites should have equal rights too) than the great issues of the recent past. This may mean that a role of increasing significance will be assumed by the older established organizations and that a decline in the emotional pitch of the movement may be expected. The effective lifespan of extreme militance is probably connected fairly precisely with that of lawless redneck sheriffs, the Ku Klux Klan, and non-Registrars of Negro voters.

It is not impossible that some branches of the civil rights movement will continue to press militantly on other fronts (foreign policy, for example) and develop a new radicalism in American politics. For the present, this seems implausible. In a time of unprecedented national affluence, an administration with broad support is highly sensitive to the needs of the depressed and oppressed and is promoting perhaps the boldest non-emergency program of socio-economic innovation in American history. Seldom has the climate for a new radical mass movement seemed less auspicious.

However this may be in the long run, the next phase in civil rights would seem to require less free-floating sentimentality and less emphasis on generalized emotional concern. Realism, detachment, compassion, and a sense of human frailty and fallibility are more likely to help deal with the many undramatic specific issues that must be faced. The realism of all the books reviewed here, the human sensitivity of the Warren and Brown books, and the political sophistication of the Powell biography are contributions to the kind of understanding all of us need.

FORBES HAYS