

BOOK REVIEWS

*The Southern Mystique*, by Howard Zinn. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964. \$4.95. Pp. ix, 267.

*Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, by Kenneth B. Clark. New York: Harper & Row, 1965. \$4.95. Pp. xxix, 251.

✓ *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, by Robert Penn Warren. New York: Random House, 1965. \$5.95. Pp. 456.

*Freedom Now!: The Civil-Rights Struggle in America*, ed. by Alan F. Westin. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964. \$5.95. Pp. xv, 346.

The exceptionalism of the American South has long been the premise of most of our thought about the states of the former Confederacy. The view that its society is guilt-ridden, sex-ridden and violence-ridden has been fostered by the writings of William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Tennessee Williams and others. It is a society built, in the first instance, on chattel slavery; it was destroyed by a bitter and prolonged civil war; it was thereafter impoverished by a dominant and industrialist North, which treated it as a colony. All of this, it is said, has resulted in a malevolent, dark and brooding "stranger to the nation." We are told that no one not born and bred in the South can fathom the white Southerner, whose entire being is dominated by a centuries-old doctrine of white supremacy and who is, hence, prepared to resist integration to the death. Similarly, the Southern Negro is reputed to be inscrutable and beyond the understanding of anyone who is not a Southern Negro; he is a mysterious being whose very thought processes have been fashioned by 350 years of slavery and oppression in a culture essentially foreign to him. This view was developed with great eloquence and compassion by Wilbur J. Cash twenty years ago in *The Mind of the South*.

Professor Zinn's thesis, in his provocative *The Southern Mystique*, is that this is essentially false. People are motivated, primarily, by the force of their present environment, and by the values of their group, not by history or the values of their ancestors. Like everyone else, the white Southerner lives by a hierarchy of values, and Zinn notes that,

while one of those values is the doctrine of white supremacy, ". . . many other things are rated higher than segregation: monetary profit, political power, staying out of jail, the approval of one's immediate peers, conforming to the dominant decision of the community."

Most white Southerners, forced to choose between working in an integrated work-force and losing a job, will choose the former. Faced with the choice of sitting next to a Negro in a theater or missing the latest Elizabeth Taylor feature, most segregationists are likely to opt for Miss Taylor. If this is so, the set against integration cannot be bred so deeply into the white Southerner; the Southern mystique is little more than skin-deep.

The political consequences of Zinn's view are significant. It will *not* be necessary to change the "mind of the South" to get it to accept national values. A long period of education of the white Southerner need *not* be a prelude to the acceptance of integration. What is needed is a leadership, both local and national, which will

. . . set out deliberately to create new situations everywhere in the South. It is true that you don't change *people* by administrative, legislative, or community power; but you do change *situations* by such power. This, by affecting the total field of influence surrounding individuals, brings alterations in behavior, and such changes in situation and behavior, are the prerequisites for changing the ideas that people hold. (*Italics in original.*)

Not only the white, but, of course, also the Negro may be expected to respond to the new situation.

What is needed, therefore, is not an educational campaign, or an appeal to good sense or morality, but the creation of situations in which conformity to the national standard of an integrated society will present a greater value than conformity to a standard of segregation supported by violence. This requires the enactment and enforcement of laws and the creation of a climate of opinion by an informed leadership. The mind of the South will be changed as a result of the creation of such new situations.

Zinn does not deny the high incidence of violence in the South, the pervading fear and hatred of the Negro, the obsession with sex, the extraordinary xenophobia. But all of this, he argues, is but a "distillation" of national characteristics:

For the South . . . far from being utterly different, is really the *essence* of the nation. It is not a mutation born by some accident into the normal lovely American family; it has simply taken the national genes and done the most with them. It contains, in concentrated and dangerous form, a set of characteristics which mark the country as a whole. . . . Those very qualities long attributed to the South as special possessions are, in truth, *American* qualities, and the nation reacts emotionally to the South precisely because it recognizes itself there.

Zinn's thesis is basically sound, and it is time that someone said it as well as he does. We have had too much acceptance of the mystique, by the liberal who wrings his hands in everlasting dismay, and by the radical youth who would read Mississippi out of the Union. Zinn documents his argument thoroughly. As he notes, the predictions of doom which are so often made when a school, beach, restaurant or factory is to be integrated are almost always false. Time and time again, the segregationist South has accepted integration when it was forced to do so. Governor Barnett offered to go to jail before permitting integration of the University of Mississippi, and Governor Vandiver threatened to "fight [school integration] wherever it raises its ugly head, in these very streets, in every city, in every town, and in every hamlet—until sanity is restored in the land." Barnett did not go to jail, and there was no fighting in the streets in Georgia over school integration. The myth of the Southern mystique is much used, both by segregationists and liberals, to postpone governmental action in the South; the usual cliché is amended to read, "It takes half a century to change human nature," with the natural inference that we cannot expect much change this year or next. This is untrue, and Zinn's exposé of the fallacy is effective and convincing.

There are, however, some exceptions which must be taken to his treatment. The first is that he makes it look all too easy. When a white Southerner's economic interest conflicts with his racist concepts, the former will, no doubt, prevail, but what happens when his economic interest will be served by the preservation of racism? Many white Southerners believe this to be true, and, indeed, it may be quite true, at least in the short run and in many circumstances. For example, when there is widespread unemployment, it is economically advantageous to the white that he have preference in employment over the Negro, at least in the present situation. Zinn argues that we must create situations in which the contrary is true, but this may not be possible without substantial changes in our economic structure. Zinn no doubt, recognizes this—he is aware that he may be accused of excessive optimism—but he fails to consider the problem. Similarly, the President and others in power probably *can* supply the leadership which, Zinn notes, is needed to attack the problem, but there is no reason to believe they will do so, and Zinn touches only very briefly on how they can be compelled to act in a way which may be against their political interests as well as their personal inclinations.

But a second, and more basic objection can be made to Zinn's treatment. There seems to be a major premise lying behind his entire thesis—a premise which is not even hinted at by the author. Zinn (and,

regretfully, many others who write on the South) seems to assume that once *de jure* segregation has been achieved, a decisive step will have been taken toward solution of the race problem in the United States. At least, there is no suggestion that anything further will remain to be done. But the fact is that acceptance of public accommodation laws, acceptance of the principle of school integration, repeal of the laws against miscegenation—in short, the institutionalization of the principle of full integration and equality—will still not bring the millennium. It may merely turn the South into a replica of the North. And it is not clear that the North is much better in terms of race relations. James Baldwin has said “There’s only a difference in the way they castrate you.”

Which brings us to Prof. Kenneth B. Clark’s important study of the condition of the Negro in the North. *Dark Ghetto* is a masterful indictment of the terrible failure of our society to meet the racial problem even when the “situation” has been created in which the principle of equality is officially recognized, and where every politician must appeal for the Negro vote. Most of the situations which Zinn calls for already exist in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and other large Northern cities; still the problems in those places may be even harder to solve than those of the South. It is easy enough to identify and take on Governor Wallace; it is not so easy to take on a society which has created and maintains Harlem or the South Side of Chicago.

Clark’s book is by far the best current treatment of the ghetto and its impact on our Northern culture. The book opens with a few sentences from an interview with an unnamed Negro man of about thirty: “A lot of times, when I’m working, I become despondent as hell and I feel like crying. I’m not a man, none of us are men! I don’t own anything. I’m not a man enough to own a store; none of us are.”

We are never permitted to forget this terrible cry of defeat. And we can feel nothing but shame that our affluent society, even in the liberal and advanced North, has created and now perpetuates a state of degradation and frustration for millions of its citizens.

The immediate cause of the “pathology of the ghetto” is not, Clark argues, the fact of segregation. Rather it is the loss of status and self-respect, the frustration, the overwhelming sense of impotence and defeat that cause apathy, crime, addiction, broken families, squalid living conditions and all of the other symptoms of social pathology.

And of these, the worst is apathy:

In a very curious way the delinquent’s behavior is healthy; for, at the least, it asserts that he still has sufficient strength to rebel and has not yet given in to defeat. One may speculate that as social reforms shore up the ego structure of

ghetto residents, there could be a temporary increase in the amount of overt rebellion which the larger society would classify as delinquent. . . . In a sense, delinquency statistics show that a group is in ferment, in the process of rejecting an earlier inferior status and moving to a higher level.

Not the least impressive part of his work is his "Strategy for Change." Clark is a psychologist, and his proposals are oriented accordingly. Since, in his view, the cause of the trouble lies in the loss of self-respect and sense of frustration of the ghetto-dweller, the change that will move toward a cure involves the building of self-respect and the recognition of the "manhood" of the Negro. Hence, a great contribution is made by the demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement, by the organized protests, by the mobilization of political power by the Negro. This, of course, requires reliance by the Negro on his own strength, rather than on the support of white well-wishers. Success based on such self-reliance results in the creation of a favorable cycle:

If mobilized community power and protest do succeed in winning concrete positive changes, Negro self-confidence and pride will grow, and a new cycle of greater personal and community effectiveness should emerge. But it would not be realistic for the white community to expect protest to subside in the face of gains, for the closer the Negro community gets to the attainment of its goals . . . the more impatient will Negroes become for total equality. . . . Success feeds hope and provides the strength and the motivation for further activity. . . . Accelerated impatience and the lowering of the threshold of frustration . . . paradoxically increase the chances of racial tensions and ferment and conflict.

Obviously Clark does not know all the answers, nor does he claim to. His strategy for change leaves many questions unanswered, but at least he raises the questions and attempts some answers. Of course, the author is not a radical, and the changes he proposes are all within the framework of our present economic and social system. However, he is militant and will not be satisfied with superficial remedies. His attack on the liberal is a devastating one, but at times he seems to place much reliance on these very liberal forces and their solutions. These are minor complaints; Prof. Clark's book is intellectually stimulating; it is necessary reading for everyone interested in the most critical of our domestic issues and should be required for those whites who honestly seek to participate in the civil rights struggle.

Fascinating reading is also offered by Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the American Negro?* Warren interviewed several dozen Negro leaders, young and old, of many shades of political opinion and understanding. The result is a volume that is somewhat diffuse. The conclusion required by the book is that no one (and no group of persons) speaks for the Negro, and we knew that before we started to read. But

Warren is a skillful interviewer and a good writer; while some of his comments are a trifle fatuous, what comes out is a full exposition of the wide variety of opinion held by the leaders of the Negro people on almost every question of tactics and strategy. This, of course, is as it should be.

A good cross-section of Negro opinion is presented, from the relatively conservative voices of Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young to the militancy and total commitment of James Forman; from the radical Malcolm X to the very intellectual Ralph Ellison; from James Baldwin to a Mississippi preacher who never reached the sixth grade. Dr. Martin Luther King's views on non-violence are fully set forth; so are the views of Prof. Kenneth Clark who thinks there might be "an unrealistic, if not pathological, basis in King's doctrine." There are, perhaps, two thoughts with which almost everyone would agree. Both are expressed in the short interview with Judge William H. Hastie, a Negro who has indeed achieved a very high degree of success. The first: "Nothing that the white man can give the Negro is as important as the respect he withholds"; the second: "You know, all Negroes spend at least a little time hating white people."

*Freedom Now!* is an undistinguished collection of undistinguished articles, speeches and other material on the Civil Rights Movement. Most of the material is old hat. There are, however, two or three pieces by Dr. Martin Luther King, James Baldwin and others that are worth preserving. By far the best piece is an article, originally published in *The Nation*, by Judge Loren Miller, a Los Angeles lawyer, and a vice-president of the NAACP. Entitled "Freedom Now—but What Then?," it discusses the ultimate goals of the Civil Rights Movement, or, to be more accurate, the failure of the Movement to have formulated ultimate goals. Judge Miller says:

The inquiry is whether civil-rights victory is an end in itself or only a beginning, a means to an end. . . . The Freedom Now Concept contemplates putting the submerged Southern Negro or the trapped Northern ghetto-dweller on a parity with his culturally deprived and disadvantaged white prototype.

This inquiry is, indeed, the question which the Movement will have to face squarely in the near future. Integration is clearly not enough, for, as James Baldwin has said, "Who wants to integrate with a burning house?"

VICTOR RABINOWITZ

*New York City*

*Movies: The History of an Art and an Institution*, by Richard Schickel.  
New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1964. \$4.95. Pp. 208.

As if it were the simplest of undertakings Richard Schickel has written one of the best—if not the very best—short history and examination of the film available. Eschewing philosophical posturing, attitudinizing and any trace of eclectic partisanship, he seeks to uncover the complex but always factual social, political and personal factors which drove the most modern and universal of all modes of communication toward fulfillment and confusion, toward growth and disintegration, exposing the unfulfilled promise which still resides within it. One can read it with pleasure, with profit, and without having to place one's lifetime of experience as a movie-goer or as a movie-maker in the ring for a battle to the cinematographic death.

Its considerable information is not blurred by emotionalism; his own point of view is presented in such fashion as to make room for the reader's, and his critical evaluation of the screen's personages in the book's latter pages is shared with many other writers of eminence in the field. It is a relief to read a substantial treatise on the film without having to wade through pompous opinionating and "proof" to "advance" or "demolish."

His short passage on D. W. Griffith is typical of his capacity to blend history and critique; one feels from it the time, the man, the specific contribution, the triumph and the tragedy. He describes Griffith's major achievements as "a new rhythm in story telling," "making the camera a participant in the action," "shaping final content by selecting elements in the composition," "the direction he perhaps inadvertently gave to the developing star system." He examines the historical (both social and economic) compulsions upon the industry to develop a production-line system of operation to achieve that final desideratum, an endless repetitiveness of product, effecting brainwashing upon its audience to so pervasive a degree that the mesmerized looked for the expected and thus protected the industry from challenge to its "numbers." Within this prison even the majority of its ablest practitioners accepted its production limitations and reduced their creative expectations to variations in treatment, having given up any participation in determining its content. That this is so can be corroborated by a reading of Joseph Von Sternberg's new book *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*—an unabashed and brash boast of a lifetime spent as a purveyor to the most prurient appetites of audiences by a man who prates of his triumph side by side with his expression of contempt for the medium and its audiences.