

BOOK REVIEWS

WARREN, ROBERT PENN: *Who Speaks for the Negro?* Random House, New York, 1965. 454 pp. \$5.95

Occasionally a book is written which has as much significance for psychiatrists and psychoanalysts as have many of the books which are published in their own field. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* by Robert Penn Warren is such a book.

It is a book of living portraits, devoid of hate and equally of sentimentality. It is at least as much about "us" as about "them," so that "us" and "them" merge in a common humanity. It is a unique picture of this country because white and black see themselves through each other and as a result merge and become indistinguishable and indivisible. Thus this book sheds light on technical problems of identity and of human boundaries.

It is a model of how to infuse a rounded picture of men, of events and of social process with insights into deep levels of human nature without introducing one word of self-conscious psychoanalytic jargon.

It is a must for any psychiatrist who wants to understand in depth the strengths and weaknesses of our country, our high purposes and our betrayals of these purposes, our decencies and our indecencies. It reflects all of this—all of our white culture and misculture—through the words, ideals, courage, honesty, confusion and clarity of the Negro leaders it portrays.

Furthermore Warren uses words not for their own sake, and not to develop elegant but insecure towers of babbling verbal metaphors, but for the beauty of precision, the beauty which results when words are used in an honest search to be truthful, that most elusive and difficult of all goals. Therefore since psychiatrists are condemned to use words to formulate their observations, to build relationships to one

another and to their patients, and to communicate to society that which they learn from their work, this book is a psychiatrist's *vade mecum*. In all of these ways it is a universal text, and also a standard against which to measure our limitations. In this sense it is a stimulus to us to overcome our own ineptitudes.

This is one of the important books of our time, and perhaps of all time. It is a reflection of our country through the minds and words of all who are portrayed here, whether great or small. Often it hurts deeply; yet the very fact that in spite of our flawed culture these men have been able to grow to this stature justifies in us some modest degree of hope that we whites have not yet destroyed the American dream entirely.

Lawrence S. Kubie