

An increasingly acute problem within the civil rights movement is the lack of a sustained dialog among its many parts. It has resulted in a stiffening of divisions (between SNCC and the NAACP, for example) and of "inside" criticism of the most visible leaders. One of the values of Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (Random House) is that it clarifies the terms for that dialog—if it is ever to occur. The book is a mosaic of interviews between poet-critic-novelist Warren and a wide range of civil rights workers. All the expected luminaries are here (Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King, James Farmer, the late Malcolm X, Bayard Rustin). But there are also students, professors at Negro colleges, novelists (James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison), psychologists (Dr. Kenneth Clark) and workers in the field, both North and South. Often Warren asks the same questions of each of these figures and then confronts the interviewee with someone else's reply. How far can nonviolence go as a tactic, particularly when the walls of the ghetto in the North are so high and buttressed by so complex a power structure? Does integration mean that the current rising pride of race and of black culture is to be sacrificed for the merger of the Negro into the gray American mainstream? What role can whites play as activists? If demonstrations alone are not enough to produce basic social change, what will be enough? These and other problems receive no definitive answers in the course of Robert Penn Warren's travels with a tape recorder, but by the end of the book it is possible to see where the root divisions within the movement exist. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* is not, however, only an intellectual exploration. Southern-born Warren, still working out his own feelings as a former apologist for "humane" segregation, distills much of the tension, pride, bitterness, irony and grim skepticism among the civil rights troops. And the novelist in him sketches each figure with a remarkable eye for details of speech, dress and mannerisms. The answer to the book's title is that no one man or organization or philosophy speaks for a majority of Negroes. While there is consensus on the need to open up this society for full Negro participation, still to be hammered out is an agreement on what kind of society there will be after desegregation. And most of us, white as well as Negro, haven't even begun to think about *that* problem.

P
A
I
B
O
R

M
A
G
A
Z
I
N
E

8
/
65

D

