

Weil's Notebooks. Interest in her philosophic thought should, in fact, not blind one to the stylistic excellence of her writing, particularly its simplicity and lucidity. Examples of both her aphorisms and the language in which her thinking is expressed are in constant evidence: "Without humility, all the virtues are finite. Only humility makes them infinite." "In another use of the word, justice is the exercise of supernatural love." "Impossibility is what limits possibilities; limit is necessity abstracted from time." "Nothing is more difficult than prayer. In all other tasks of the religious life, however exacting, one can sometimes rest; but there is no rest in prayer, up to the end of one's life." "To give a piece of bread is more than preaching a sermon, as Christ's Cross is more than his parables." "Beauty is a providential dispensation by which truth and justice, while still unrecognized, call silently for our attention." "Once we have understood how it develops minute personal failings into public crimes, then nothing is a minute personal failing. One's little faults can only be crimes."

Invariably, then, as one follows the various tracks leading through Simone Weil's Notebooks, one is aware of being, as T. S. Eliot said, in "contact with a great soul." But, beyond this, she is the kind of mystic and saint ("the saint of the churchless," as she has been called) who serves as a guide leading the soul toward God. Admittedly hers are concerns so unyielding and relentless in their spiritual essences—she has been described as suffering from the "vertigo of the absolute"—that her conception of what is human is distorted by an excess of love for the superhuman. To insist on such a view, however, is to ignore the peculiar quality of her thought and of her mysticism which Rees speaks of as "an uncommonly refined common sense." One need only think of Simone Weil's belief in the need "To love men in the same way as the sun would love us if it saw us"; or her insistence, in the last sentence of these Notebooks, that "The most important part of teaching = to teach what

it is to *know* (in the scientific sense)"—to know, that is, "with one's whole soul"—to understand why, in spite of her asceticism, her repeated flights into the country of the spirit, her "immoderate affirmations" (to quote Eliot again), her impatience for the absolute, she is also always looking behind her, beckoning by her example to men tormented by the demon of doubt to follow her in the last and greatest quest.

Simone Weil's Notebooks, though they contain fragments, the rough drafts of her thought, are nonetheless paradigms of spiritual progress won through meditation. As stark and severe as her meditations are, they have much to say about the glory of the inner life; and to meditate on her meditations is to participate in an experience of the inner life that modern man has ignored to his growing peril. If Simone Weil's works remind us of a standard, they also remind us of an inner discipline of effort and attention and solitude without which life is incomplete. "Depths of silence," writes Thibon, "have to be traversed in order to grasp the authentic meaning of her words." But when we have grasped it, we are able to communicate with one whose meditations on the life of man and "the needs of the soul" place her among the first philosophers of our civilization.

Reviewed by GEORGE A. PANICHAS

What the Blacks Want

What Country Have I? Political Writings by Black Americans, edited by Herbert F. Storing, *New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970. vii + 235 pp.*

HERBERT STORING states in his opening paragraph that his aim in this work "has been to select those writings that explore

most deeply and widely, and in fairly brief compass, the American polity and the blacks' place in it—or out of it." The particular authors represented, he says, "are distinguished by their capacity to give coherent, deep-rooted, well thought-out *reasons* for their position," and thus merit consideration as serious political thinkers.

Such an endeavor is not to be treated lightly. White readers face an inevitable block to appreciation of black political writing because all of that writing points out societal flaws—often, to be sure, in exaggerated terms—we find it easier to overlook, and much of that writing harshly attacks whites for causing those flaws. Since the race question is simply not going to pass away unanswered with other *foci* of dissatisfaction, it would be wise—more; it is *essential*—for whites to familiarize themselves with the terminology and arguments of the accusers, even as capitalists need to analyze the Marxist critique.

Storing succeeds to a surprising degree in his task. Virtually every strand of black thought is represented in this anthology by at least one article: separatist (Eldridge Cleaver) and integrationist (Martin Luther King), radical (Julius Lester) and conservative (Joseph H. Jackson), emotional (Albert Cleage, Jr.) and analytical (Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton), semi-literate (Malcolm X) and polished (James Baldwin). Virtually every thesis is at least plausible; many criticisms are trenchant, and a few are convincing.

To a certain extent, any anthology will defy summation because of the inevitable variances in quality among authors, numbering here a baker's dozen. It becomes necessary to discuss at least a few of the pieces, when none can be truly "representative" of the rest. A strong critic could damn the work simply by quoting the rantings of Malcolm X, while an admirer could do the opposite with others. Let it be clear, therefore, that this is a mixed bag, worthy in different parts of both objection and acceptance.

There is no way to avoid Malcolm X. The speech reprinted here, entitled "The Ballot or the Bullet," stands out from the rest as he himself did before his murder. The brute verbal force with which he dominated and captivated his followers (and continues to do so) is likely to paralyze some readers with exasperation. One wonders where to begin a response, a familiar feeling to those who have listened to the current crop of left-wing orators. Here, for instance, is Malcolm speaking just before passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

And your and my leaders have the audacity to run around clapping their hands and talk about how much progress we're making. And what a good president we have. If he wasn't good in Texas, he sure can't be good in Washington, D. C. Because Texas is a lynch state. It is in the same breath as Mississippi, no different; only they lynch you in Texas with a Texas accent and lynch you in Mississippi with a Mississippi accent. And these Negro leaders have the audacity to go and have some coffee in the White House with a Texan, a Southern cracker—that's all he is—and then come out and tell you and me that he's going to be better for us because, since he's from the South, he knows how to deal with Southerners. What kind of logic is that? Let Eastland be president, he's from the South too. He should be better able to deal with them than Johnson.

His pages are filled with factually erroneous statements as well as rhetorical distortions. It simply is not true, for example, that "the Constitution itself has within it the machinery to expel any representative from a state where the voting rights of the people are violated," or that "any time anyone violates your human rights, you can take them to the world court." This may be grist for a political rally, but it is not, contrary to Storing's assertion, serious political thought.

Fortunately, Malcom is even more an aberration to this collection than he was to black thought while alive. Booker T. Washington, by way of contrast, is rejected out of hand by today's young black militants (few of whom seem to have read any of his works), but his emphasis on economic self-sufficiency as the key to racial progress has modern echoes ranging from President Nixon's campaign talk of "black capitalism" to the black power demands of the contemporary theorists of separatism.

Speaking more generally, the common theme running through all of the selections is the continuing debate between separatism and integration as answers to the question posed in the title. The casual white reader might easily be captivated by the apparent moderation of the integrationists (especially when posed against the bombast of some separatists), but the tragic failures of integrationist ideals during the past two decades should raise suspicions. Those ideals—represented here mainly by James Weldon Johnson's "Isolation or Integration?"—sound increasingly quaint now that blacks have begun to reject them almost as forcefully as have whites. It is not to be wondered at that, according to George Gallup, four out of ten blacks oppose bussing of their children to achieve racial balance in schools. After all, as Joseph Alsop has pointed out, the assertion that blacks cannot learn unless proportionately interspersed with whites is a monumental insult.

Far more convincing is the line of thought represented by W. E. B. du Bois and Stokely Carmichael—surprisingly so, I hasten to add, in light of their radical leanings. At least in the selections presented here, both men are concerned with cultural preservation, a very conservative concept. Du Bois proposes in his creed for a Negro Academy,

not such social equality between these races as would disregard human likes and dislikes, but such a social equilibrium as would, throughout all the

complicated relations of life, give due and just consideration to culture, ability, and moral worth, whether they be found under white or black skins.

Carmichael is even more specific:

"Integration" also means that black people must give up their identity, deny their heritage. . . . The fact is that integration, as traditionally articulated, would abolish the black community. The fact is that what must be abolished is not the black community, but the dependent colonial status that has been inflicted upon it.

When stripped of its excesses (Marxism, bigotry and violence), the doctrine of separatism seems more aware of human fallibility and is thus more realistic than the unbounded reliance upon the perfectibility of men found in much integrationist writing.

The process of thought can be taught with the aid of almost any writing, if the teacher himself knows the uses of textual analysis. (It is said of a certain Harvard Law School professor that he could be as effective using nursery rhymes as others could with legal texts.) Still, it is not to be denied that works of true scholarship are better source materials and can relieve many professorial shortcomings. Storing has put together a work of such scholarship, an easy entry into the realm of black thought for the general reader and a fruitful collection for the student of American problems. One hopes that the nascent black studies departments will make use of *What Country Have I?* and works of similar quality.

Reviewed by DENNIS R. NOLAN

African Mythomania

Africa in History, by Basil Davidson,
New York: The Macmillan Company,
1968.

The Lost Cities of Africa, by Basil
Davidson, *Boston: Little, Brown and*
Company, 1959.

Teachers' Guide to African History,
by William Loren Katz, *Chicago: Quad-*
rangle Books, Inc.

A Glorious Age in Africa, by Daniel
Chu and Elliott Skinner, *Garden City,*
N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc.,
1965.

Black History, edited by Melvin Drim-
mer, *Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday &*
Company, Inc., 1968.

THERE IS A CLOSER relationship than one might suppose *prima facie* between the philosophers of history and the contemporary eulogistic historians of Negro Africa. The former are concerned with the causes and rhythms of the rise and fall of civilizations and their location in space and time. Most have concluded that Negro Africa lies outside the zone of civilization and that its inhabitants have never created any significant or original integrated cultural system.¹

The negrophile historians of Africa are not primarily concerned with stating "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*," as Leopold Ranke defined the aim of history, but with proving that African culture-civilizations were comparable in quality to those of other regions. Alternately, they seek to show that any shortfall in African Negro creativity was due to environmental handicaps or oppression by non-Negroes. The alleged "golden era of the western Sudan," according to the inaccurate propagandistic book of Chu and Skinner, was destroyed

by Moorish invaders;² others blame the African slave trade for the barbarism which European explorers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries found in West Africa.

The propagandistic goal of much of contemporary Negro and African history is at times avowed with commendable candor. Thus, Melville J. Herskovits, a pioneer in this hagiographic sociology, declared that he wished "to give the Negro an appreciation of his past . . . to endow him with the confidence in his own position in this country and in the world *which he must have . . .*"³ It need scarcely be stressed that this approach to sociology and history is incompatible with scholarly objectivity.

The former *Manchester Guardian* correspondent, Basil Davidson, has devoted the past twenty years to turning out volumes on African history which have been extravagantly praised by reviewers who are ideologically committed to the glorification of the black African past. As history, Davidson's latest effort,⁴ is pretentious, filled with sociological clichés, and an evasion of the main issue, namely, the character and quality of autonomous Negro civilizations. "The seductively agreeable belief so dear to nineteenth century Europe," Davidson writes, "that all in Africa was savage chaos before the coming of the Europeans may linger here and there, but not among historians concerned with Africa."⁵

Obviously, nineteenth century Europe did not for a moment imagine that "all in Africa was savage chaos"; it was keenly aware of the fact that great civilizations had been created on that continent, those of Egypt, Carthage, and Roman Africa, for example. What the Europeans of that day asserted was a very different proposition, namely, that Negroes had never created a civilization of their own either in Africa or elsewhere.

Davidson makes his case by mixing Arab and Berber civilizations with Negro societies indiscriminately and seldom revealing to his readers which were which. Moreover, Africa was never a continental unity. Whereas the Mediterranean served as a