

Race Betrayal

STRANGER AND ALONE. By J. Saunders Redding. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 308 pp. \$3.

By ANN PETRY

NEGROES react in a thousand ways to the loose and unwritten code which governs relations between Negroes and whites in the United States. In order to survive they resist the code. This resistance ranges from a do-nothing withdrawal, a kind of passive resistance, to the active resistance which becomes open defiance. Somewhere in between these two extremes are the compromisers, the people who fight and run away, the choosers of the lesser of two very evil evils, the ones who practise discretion, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating but never offering a direct challenge to the code.

Novelists tend to choose the more dramatic of these responses as the theme for their novels because the bloody record of the ones who defied the code speaks directly to the reader, moving him to pity and terror.

But there is still another way in which Negroes survive, another, much less publicized response to prejudice. It is based on complete acceptance of the code, approval of it. The people who show this reaction believe that Negroes are inferior and work to preserve the code. This response is the basic theme of J. Saunders Redding's first novel "Stranger and Alone," a book which evokes pity and terror in the reader as effectively as any of the fiction which dramatized the death agony of the protesting outraged victims who hurled defiance at the code.

Shelton Howden, hero of "Stranger and Alone," is obviously a victim. But he is not the protesting, outraged Negro who has so often been portrayed in novels. He is not even aware that he is a victim and so he is doubly frightening. Believing that members of his race belong in a special separate "place" he helps keep them there.

Howden was an orphan. His mother was a Negro. His father was white. He had no memory of either of them, no conscious recollection of any kind of family life. When he was twenty-one he entered New Hope College in Louisiana as a work student. His poverty, his cheap clothes, his self-consciousness set him apart from the other students. In a class in sociology, taught by a white professor on loan to the school, he first heard and accepted as fact the theory that Negroes are inferior human beings. Thus he began to place a high value on security, his own personal security.

After he graduated he worked as a dining-car waiter, hoarding his earnings to pay for the education he felt he needed. Later he received a graduate scholarship which enabled him to spend two years at "the University in New York." As a teacher at Arcadia College for Negroes he found the security he had always wanted. He became the protégé of the president, Perkins Thomas Wimbush. Wimbush completed Howden's education. He was a master of intrigue who sneered at the "nigra's" efforts to achieve some sort of status, and he worked quietly and industriously to frustrate their effort. And Wimbush saw to it that Howden became superintendent of Negro schools in the state.

At forty-odd Howden was a success, secure in his job, so contented with his lot in life that his only real worry was his thickening waistline. His contempt for Negroes finally reached such depth and magnitude that he was ready to commit the big act of betrayal of his race toward which he had been heading all his life. As he approaches this action he knows no regrets, he does not hesitate. "Betrayal couldn't be this simple and easy. It should be accompanied by strange visitations, he thought cynically—lightning and thunder, shakings of the earth. But he felt nothing—." The reader, however, shivers because the same code that spawned and nurtured President Wimbush created Shelton Howden. And he is more frightening than a lynch victim.

This is a first-rate novel and a moving one. J. Saunders Redding has added a new and wonderful set of characters to the annals of the fiction that deals with race relations.

Ann Petry is author of the "The Street," a novel.



J. Saunders Redding—"another, much less publicized response to prejudice."

Sailors of Fortune

THE SEA EAGLES. By John Jennings. New York: Doubleday & Co. 299 pp. \$3.

By HARRISON SMITH

JOHN JENNINGS is a relative newcomer to the ranks of romance writers about the American Revolution, but one of the best. In two lively novels, "The Salem Frigate" and now "The Sea Eagles," he has staked out as his territory the familiar old streets and waterfront towns from Chesapeake Bay to Cape Elizabeth, and the armed ships and sloops on which his two heroes sail cross the Atlantic to the West Indies, invade the Irish Sea, and take their prizes into the ports of France.

In "The Sea Eagles" his story begins when young Joshua Barney, son of a Baltimore seafaring family, brings back from Ireland a young hotheaded bondsman who has an imperative reason for getting out of Dublin in a hurry. In Baltimore Kenny Boyle promptly falls in love with his friend's young sister and is forced to content himself with dreaming of her and occasionally quarreling with her in a rich brogue until they are united in the last chapter. Joshua is in love with a Philadelphia girl who is a niece of Robert Morris, financier of the Revolution and one of the creators of the American Navy. He also has to wait for her until the end of the book.

Aside from these necessary romantic entanglements, both young men undergo most of the adventures and hardships involved with privateering and raiding English ships in European waters during those stirring years. The first naval ship on which Joshua and Kenny sail, the sloop *Hornet*, is commanded by an incompetent and cowardly Bermudian who refuses to fight and vanishes from the scene when he ties up at Philadelphia. The next is the *André Doria*, another little ship of the gallant fleet under Commodore Hopkins, which first carried the flag of the United States Navy. On the cruise to the West Indies to bring back French powder and munitions a small British sloop is taken without difficulty. The friends are divided by the loss of a lubberly prize, and Joshua is taken aboard a British man-of-war. For a good part of the novel the young men languish in prison in England or on one of the verminous hulks kept by the British at New York. There are a few rip-roaring and highly satisfactory naval engagements, with cannon roaring, splinters, shells, and bullets flying, and with blood and death everywhere.

The full-length account of John

Paul Jones's famous cruise in English waters as commander of the *Bonne-homme Richard* is described by Kenny with an admirable absence of patriotic fervor. When it comes to the immortal victory of Captain Jones's reconverted old French merchantman over the *Serapis*, a new and more heavily armed British battleship, the author lets go with all his guns. It is as bloody and hair-raising a description of those ancient battles when ships lay hull to hull and tore each other and their crews to pieces as we have read for a long time.

Mr. Jennings's novel is at its best when ships are at sea or when he is able to keep one of his two principal characters at rest for a while. Its major fault as a coherent story is the result of trying to keep up with two heroes of equal importance to his plot. This forces him to hold one of them in jail for long periods while the other goes about his business, mourning his friend's loss or death. Since they have to meet occasionally somewhere on his broad canvas of sea and land, he has to use and strain that old device known as the long arm of coincidence too many times. Aside from these minor faults, "The Sea Eagles" can be recommended to anyone who finds novels of the American Revolution a continual and profitable source of pleasure.

FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT: No. 349

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 349 will be found in the next issue.

ISLZZLK PZ AOL THU

DOV, OHCPUN UVAOPUN

AV ZHF, HIZAHPUZ

MYVT NPCPUN PU

DVYKZ LCPKLUJL VM

AOL MHJA. —NLVYNL

LSPVA.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 348

A world where nothing is had for nothing. —ARTHUR CLOUGH.

Bligh of Botany Bay

STORM OF TIME. By Eleanor Dark.
New York: Whittlesey House. 590
pp. \$3.50.

By VICTOR P. HASS

BEFORE Charles Laughton puts aside his grease paint for the last time and retires to his fireside it would be a rewarding experience to see him put on Captain William Bligh's uniform again in a film version of "Storm of Time." As Bligh of the *Bounty*, Mr. Laughton, as I remember him, was splendid. As Bligh of Botany Bay, the harrassed and finally beaten Governor of New South Wales, he could be even finer. And if Hollywood could be convinced that it should put all of its geniuses under wraps and merely follow Mrs. Dark's novel faithfully (except for the title; there is magic in the alliteration of Bligh of Botany Bay) there might be another Oscar for Mr. Laughton to put on the mantel of the fireplace when he retires.

For there is the stuff of powerful drama in "Storm of Time." It is an historical novel (in the richest meaning of that term) which is alive with people and events. And if it is sometimes turgid it is never lacking in strength. It is a very long time since I have read a novel that kept me up so late or claimed my attention so completely.

Eleanor Dark has set down here the story of those tense years between 1799 and 1808, when the fate of Britain's penal colony of New South Wales (it was later to be called Australia) was being decided. It is the story of a great many people but principally it is the story of three governors—Hunter, King, and Bligh—and one superbly clever antagonist of all of them—Captain John Macarthur.

Through his control of the New South Wales garrison at the outset and later through free land, convict labor, a monopoly of trade, and an iron grip on the illegal traffic on rum, Macarthur had worked his way to wealth and power and influential friendships with the Colonial Office in London. Hunter he broke easily because that affable, honest, and helpless man was a weak reed in the first place. Philip Gidley King, able and arrogant, took more doing, but before long Macarthur's cunning had undermined him and wrecked him physically. Bligh was toughest of all because he was as strong as Macarthur and the iron determination that had taken him across 4,000 miles of ocean in an open boat after the *Bounty* mutiny had not soft-



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ened with time. The hero of Copenhagen and Camperdown was no push-over. Indeed, he was so tough that Macarthur finally had to show his hand and engineer the Rum Rebellion of 1808 to unseat him. There this story ends. It was not until two years later that Bligh won vindication and a rear admiralship in the bargain.

Entwined with this savage struggle between the governors and Macarthur and his clique Mrs. Dark has set down two other stories. One is an absorbing account of the founding of a vast plantation by a cruel and competent Irish gentleman named Mannion. This takes in the fight for freedom of the convicts under the leadership of brave and highly educated "felons" who had been banished for no greater crime than preaching the equality of man. Their manual for freedom was Tom Paine's "Common Sense." The other story is pure adventure—a yarn about a white boy turned "native" and of his life in the bush. It couldn't have been written better.

If I were to complain at all about "Storm of Time" it would be to suggest that Mrs. Dark waits too long to bring Bligh onto the stage and that the publishers erred in not devoting the endpapers to a detailed map. Coping with an atlas is exasperating when you are holding a novel as heavy as this.

But this is beside the point. What is to the point is that here is a solid, leisurely novel that pays handsome dividends in pleasure and knowledge.