

Toward Freedom

THE Public Affairs Committee's new pamphlet, "The Negro in America," written by Maxwell Stewart, does an able job of summarizing in 32 pages Gunnar Myrdal's two-volume (nearly 1,500 pages) work, *An American Dilemma*. The need it serves and the limitations it reflects are a telling indictment of our culture.

The pamphlet sets forth, in simple language and with striking illustrations, a wide range of facts about the Negro people — the handicaps they face, their achievements, their struggles for freedom and their changing status in wartime America. This should be commonplace information about 13,000,000 people whose relations to our society constitute one of the most explosive and dangerous problems on the American scene. Yet here are facts about which most citizens, especially those southerners who boast that they "know the Negro," are really quite ignorant.

Our press, radio, cinema and schools have long conspired to suppress or distort even the most rudimentary facts about Negro life. Thus have they allowed to persist, and have greatly strengthened, that traditional network of myths and prejudices which (as in



By Doxey Wilkerson

the recent Philadelphia transit strike) make it so easy for charlatans and traitors to strike powerful blows at the freedom and security of our country.

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ALTHOUGH "The Negro in America" is an effective presentation of a wide variety of facts, it, like the larger study upon which it is based, does little to explain the fundamental origins and nature of the Negro problem as a whole.

The pamphlet states: "In principle, most Americans . . . concede that the Negro has the same right to freedom and justice as other citizens. But in practice, Negroes have not shared many of these rights. This gap between our profession and our actions constitutes, according to Dr. Myrdal, 'the Negro problem.'" Similarly, *An American Dilemma* states: "The American Negro problem is in the heart of the American. . . . It is there that the decisive struggle goes on."

But when comes this hiatus between avowed ideals and practice, this struggle of the "heart"? How is its vitality maintained? It is primarily a "moral issue" (as Myrdal contends), or is it an outgrowth of the larger struggles which go on in the market place, in the political arena, and on the battlefields of this people's war? Many of the "facts" essential to answer these questions

Observations on Stewart's 'The Negro in America'

are included in the pamphlet, and even more so in the original study, but the really important inferences are never drawn.

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BOTH in their historical origins and in their current manifestations, those social forms and relationships referred to as "the Negro problem" arose and have been maintained primarily as a technique for the economic exploitation and political domination of the masses of white and Negro Americans. The attitudes of which we are keenly aware are but subjective reflections of the objective conflicts going on in the concrete world about us, and of which we all are a part.

In addition to "facts" about this or that aspect of the Negro problem, our nation needs quickly to gain this basic insight into the nature of the problem as a whole. Then can we more readily see its implications for such larger issues as the electoral college conspiracy in the South, problems of postwar employment and security, and the necessity for the complete destruction of fascism.

Howard Fast's novel, *Freedom Road*, lays bare the essence of the Negro problem, in fundamental terms which our country needs sorely to understand; but one will look in vain for comparable insights in most of the academic treatises now written on "The Negro in America."