

Among the Recent Letters to the Editor



Freedom and the South

TO THE EDITOR:

IN his review of Dan Wakefield's book, "Revolt in the South" Claude Sitton seems to resent anyone making a judgment on the Southern situation in terms of "Black and White" as he evidently prefers everything in life to be sort of a dirty, washday gray.

The stimulating thing about Mr. Wakefield's book is that he has some moral indignation. He is not a mere reporter, but he is committed to the side of justice. Viewed in these terms, it is hard to see why Mr. Sitton feels that he was biased. Should all of our judgments be made on the basis of neutrality?

I think "objectivity" has become a device for staying out of trouble when you don't want to take sides for fear of the consequences. I wonder when our Northern fellow citizens will wake up to the fact that this is not a battle between the "Black and White" races, this is a battle between the American ideas and ideals of Constitutional Law and the forces of revolt and defiance of the law. It is as much to their advantage as it is to ours to see the rule of law preserved.

VIRGINIA DUELL

Montgomery, Ala.

TO THE EDITOR:

There are two technical errors in "Revolt in the South." For Ford Foundation, one should read Fund for the Republic; and the bus boycott in Atlanta never came off.

These errors do not detract from the truth of Mr. Wakefield's book. Your reviewer indulges in an illegitimate sleight-of-hand; for example, the people who make up the Citizens Councils represent, until today, those elements in the Deep South to which each Southern politician refers himself when running for office. This is one of the reasons for the war between certain Southern cities—as, for example Atlanta—and Southern towns. "With few exceptions," those Southern editors who have offended this element are either no longer working in the South or have no audience in the South.

From my own experience in the South, as well as from the newspapers and T. V. coverage,

it seems incontestable that the law enforcement in Alabama and Mississippi is not at all untypical of the region. On the contrary. And, finally, I cannot imagine—or perhaps I prefer not to imagine—what your reviewer is talking about when he speaks of the middle ground in the racial struggle. There is no middle ground. Either one believes that the present way of life in the South is right or one believes that it is wrong. If one believes it is right, one must fight to maintain it, and if one believes it is wrong one must fight to overthrow it.

JAMES BALDWIN.

New York.

A Reply

TO THE EDITOR:

ALTHOUGH I don't necessarily prefer it, as Mrs. Durr implies, life is often "a dirty, washday gray." Mr. Wakefield's right to judge subjectively was not challenged. But is it too much to ask that these judgments be grounded upon fact? The issue is too important and public understanding of it too vital for sloppy reporting. This can only lead to faulty assessment, faulty planning and faulty action.

There are more than two errors in the book not all "technical." Space limitations prevented a cataloguing of them. It is refreshing to see Mr. Baldwin concede, as Mr. Wakefield does not, that the Citizens Councils do not reign supreme in all areas of the Deep South. He would find more dissent on closer examination. The names of Southern newspaper editors who have fought the councils are legion—Jack Spalding of The Atlanta Journal, Sylvan Meyer of The Gainesville (Ga.) Times, C. A. McKnight of The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer, Martin S. Ochs of The Chattanooga Daily Times, to name but a few. All are still working in the South and all still have their audiences. I know of no responsible Negro leader who would agree with the contention that law enforcement in Alabama and Mississippi is typical of that, say, in North Carolina. Mr. Baldwin's other questions can be answered by a second reading of the review.

CLAUDE SITTON.

Atlanta, Ga.