The American Negro in Selected Writings of Robert Penn Warren

H. Lynette Olson

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THE AMERICAN NEGRO
IN SELECTED WRITINGS
OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser  Date

Head, English Department  Date
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WARREN'S SOUTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. WARREN'S NORTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WARREN'S IMAGE OF THE NEGRO</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUMMARY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WARREN'S SOUTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. WARREN'S NORTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WARREN'S IMAGE OF THE NEGRO</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUMMARY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Robert Penn Warren is one of the most eminent contemporary authors in the United States, and he "has distinguished himself as poet, novelist, literary critic, and teacher."\(^1\) He has made important contributions to fiction, poetry, drama, criticism, and biography and has won the Pulitzer Prize for both his fiction and for his poetry.

Born in Kentucky and raised in Tennessee, Warren has always identified himself with the South, and even though he has lived away from the South much of his adult life, most of his writings are influenced by the South. He has employed his Southern background in nearly all his writings, and his subjects are usually taken from Southern history. In fact, he himself says: "It never crossed my mind when I began writing fiction that I could write about anything except life in the South. It never crossed my mind that I knew about anything else; knew, that is, well enough to write about."\(^2\)

Warren was born in Guthrie, Kentucky, on April 24, 1905. His early boyhood was spent going to school winters in Guthrie and roaming on his grandfather's farm summers. He attended high school in nearby Clarksville, Tennessee.


Following graduation from high school, Warren entered Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. While attending Vanderbilt, he was influenced by his freshman English professor, John Crowe Ransom, and by his English literature professor, Donald Davidson. Both Ransom and Davidson were leading members of a group of writers called the "Fugitives."

The Fugitives were a group of campus intellectuals at Vanderbilt University composed of both faculty and students. They evolved an influential American literary movement of the twentieth century. Basically they were a group of Southern writers opposed to the industrial growth of the South. They argued that industrial growth tended to dehumanize man. In his book Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground, Leonard Casper writes that the Fugitives clearly saw as their common target industrial brutalization of man. By dedicating itself to the discovery of labor-saving methods and machinery, science had assumed that labor could not be a happy function of human life but was practiced only for the pleasure of its rewards. Worse, by giving man the illusion of controlling nature, science deprived him of his religious respect for the mysterious and contingent; nor could the arts thrive where there was this general decay of sensibility. A culture close to the imponderables of nature, however, would renew feelings of responsibility and humility.3

The Fugitives stressed a dedication to scholarship as a background study for their writing, but they were also interested in contemporary writing. After T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land was published in 1922, Davidson gave Warren a copy, and Warren had the opportunity to discuss the new poetry with his professors.

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During his undergraduate years at Vanderbilt, Warren gained the friendship of a fellow student, Allen Tate, who was also from Kentucky. Tate was already a member of the Fugitives, and he was impressed with Warren's poetry. He encouraged Warren to show his poetry to the editors of The Fugitive, a literary magazine on campus. The editors published the poetry, and in his junior year Warren was invited to become a member of the group. Membership in the Fugitives gave him a stimulus for writing poetry and an outlet for publication of his poetry.

Warren graduated summa cum laude from Vanderbilt in 1925. In 1927, he finished his Master of Arts degree at the University of California. He then entered Yale for additional study. While studying at Yale, he published his first book, a biography entitled John Brown: The Making of a Martyr.

In 1928 Warren went to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar from Kentucky. At Oxford he met another Vanderbilt alumnus and Rhodes scholar, Cleanth Brooks. With Brooks, he later edited a number of anthologies and college textbooks. Probably their two most influential textbooks were Understanding Poetry (1938) and Understanding Fiction (1943).4

While attending Oxford, Warren kept his connection with the Fugitives at Vanderbilt. Through them he had become acquainted with a group of Southern writers known as the Agrarians. The Agrarians, many of them members of the Fugitive group, were concerned with the impact of Northern industrialization in the South following World War I.

4Bohner, p. 38.
Together, the Agrarians published a collection of essays called *I'll Take My Stand*, which supported the agrarian way of life. To it, Warren contributed his essay "The Briar Patch." In "The Briar Patch" Warren defended agrarian life and also segregation in the South.

After returning from Oxford in 1930, Warren began his career as a teacher of English at Southwestern College in Memphis. Later he taught at Vanderbilt, and in 1934 he became a member of the English staff at Louisiana State University. While teaching at Louisiana State University, he was asked to edit a magazine, *Southern Review*. The magazine's purpose was to make a contribution to the cultural life of the South. Because of insufficient funds, the outbreak of World War II, and friction among faculty members, the magazine was short-lived; publication was suspended within one year. Following the suspension of *Southern Review* in 1942, Warren left Louisiana State University and went to the University of Minnesota to take a position as director of the creative writing program.

Much of Warren's writing concerns the South, as he himself has said. In the field of non-fiction, he has written a biography *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (1929) which is the study of a Puritan who follows an idea, freedom for slaves, and is himself eventually hanged following a raid at Harper's Ferry. In 1930 in "The Briar Patch" in *I'll Take My Stand*, he not only defended agrarianism and segregation but attacked industrialism in the South. In 1958 he

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5Bohner, p. 39.

6Bohner, p. 41.
published *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South*, which was a long essay containing a report of conversations he had had with Southerners and with himself. It is a survey of Southern attitudes on the race problem and reveals some of the complex problems of the race question in the South. Another piece of non-fiction is his essay *The Legacy of the Civil War*, published in 1961, in which he analyzes the causes and the results of the Civil War. Warren's latest non-fiction *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, published in 1965, is "a transcript of conversations, with settings and commentaries."7 In it he interviews Negro leaders in both the North and South concerning the growing strength of the Negro Revolution in the United States.

In addition to his non-fiction, Warren has published a notable amount of poetry. His poems have been collected in several volumes. *Pondy Woods and Other Poems* was published in 1930. *Thirty-Six Poems* was published in 1935 and *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme* in 1942. In the winter of 1944 he published his *Selected Poems, 1923-1943*, which was a collection made up mainly of the poems which had already appeared in *Thirty-Six Poems* and in *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme*. One important poem was added: "The Ballad of Billie Potts," a narrative poem.

In 1957 Warren published *Promises: Poems 1954-1956* for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. In addition to these collections, Warren also published a long narrative poem, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices*, the story of the brutal murder of a slave by his master and of the hardships of living on the new frontier.

Although Warren has made contributions to both non-fiction and poetry, he is probably best known for his novels. Most of these are laid in the South. His first novel, *Night Rider*, published in 1939, is the story of the Kentucky tobacco country at the turn of the century. It draws upon the Kentucky tobacco wars of the early 1900's. *At Heaven's Gate*, published in 1943, has as its central character the daughter of a Southern financier who rebels against her father and is eventually murdered. His best-known novel, *All the King's Men*, published in 1946, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1947. It is the story of the rise and assassination of a Louisiana politician whose prototype was Huey Long. Another novel, *World Enough and Time*, published in 1950, concerns the murder by Jeremiah Beaumont of a politician and lawyer, Colonel Cassius Fort. It is based on a sensational murder case in 1825 in Kentucky. *Band of Angels*, 1955, traces the life of a mulatto, Amantha Starr, from her early childhood through her adult life. In 1959 Warren published *The Cave*, the story of a young man trapped in a Tennessee cave. *Wilderness: A Tale of the Civil War*, was published in 1961. In *Wilderness*, Adam, a young man from Bavaria, is drawn into the conflict of the Civil War. Warren's latest novel, *Flood*, was published in 1963. It is the story of a screen writer, Brad Tolliver, and a famous director, Yasha Jones, whose purpose was to create a film about a town that was to be flooded by the Tennessee Valley Program. In 1948, Warren also published *The Circus in the Attic* which is a collection of novelettes and short stories based on the South.

With Cleanth Brooks, the friend he met at Oxford, Warren became a leader of the New Critics, a school of criticism opposed to the
historical or biographical approach to literature. They emphasized literary techniques in their anthologies and college textbooks. Thus, Warren made an important contribution to modern criticism.

Although so much of Warren's writing deals with the South, either directly or imaginatively, most critics have concentrated on five specific themes when discussing Warren's literature. These five themes are the problem of evil, the meaning of history, the human penchant for violence, the search for self-knowledge, and the need for self-fulfillment.  

In reading two 1965 collections of critical essays--Leonard Casper's Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground and Charles H. Bohner's Robert Penn Warren--one is surprised that so little critical material is included concerning the Negro characters in Warren's writings. Seldom is the relationship of Negro to white society discussed. Whenever the Negro is discussed, the subject is tied in with the theme of the search for self-knowledge. Amantha's first words in Band of Angels are "Oh, who am I?" 

In his discussion of Segregation, Casper discusses the search for self-knowledge. He points out that Warren says that "the problem is not to learn to live with the Negro; it is to learn to live with ourselves." 

The relationship of the Negro to society is a theme of many of

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8Bohner, Preface.
9Casper, p. 150.
10Casper, p. 150.
Warren's writings, but research shows that no one has yet made a study of his treatment of the Negro character. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Warren's various images of the Negro and to determine Warren's attitude toward the Negro as revealed in his writings.

This thesis is limited with the exception of three short stories to the following writings of Robert Penn Warren because they best reveal Warren's viewpoint. The novels used are *Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, All the King's Men, Band of Angels,* and *Wilderness.* In addition to these five novels, sources of information are Warren's long narrative poem *Brother to Dragons,* and his two books of non-fiction, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* and *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

To determine Warren's attitude toward the Negro from the images used by Warren in his writing, this paper will examine the Negro from three different viewpoints. Chapter two examines the Southern white attitude toward the Negro as expressed in Warren's work. Chapter three analyzes the Northern white attitude toward the Negro, and Chapter four shows Warren's view of the Negro. All three of these elements are important in understanding Warren's attitude toward the Negro.

In his latest book *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, Warren admits that his first book, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr,* was filled with Southern defensiveness. He also admits that his essay "The Briar Patch," which was written when he was in England, now makes him uncomfortable. He says that even though the essay was a humane defense

of segregation, in the back of his mind was an awareness that there existed something in segregation that was not humane.\textsuperscript{12}

Warren says that many whites, both North and South, and many Negroes are victims of past, false learning, and apparently he would have his reader believe he is trying to rid himself of his earlier white Southern prejudices. According to Charles H. Bohner, Warren has completely reversed his earlier position on segregation since writing "The Briar Patch." Bohner claims that Warren's long essay, Segregation: \textit{The Inner Conflict in the South} is in contrast to Warren's treatment of segregation in "The Briar Patch."\textsuperscript{13} True, in \textit{Segregation} Warren does recognize that segregation cannot give equal rights for whites and Negroes, but again, as he did in "The Briar Patch," he stresses his point that a change from segregation to integration must be a very slow and gradual process. In an interview with himself, Warren says he is for desegregation, but it must be gradual enough to take time for an "educational process, preferably a calculated one....a process of mutual education for whites and blacks....Gradualism is all you'll get. History, like nature, knows no jumps."\textsuperscript{14}

In \textit{Segregation} Warren seems to question his own ability to rid himself of a certain degree of Southern defensiveness. He recalls a Yankee friend who said that Southerners and Jews were exactly alike.

\textsuperscript{12}Warren, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{13}Bohner, p. 35.
They were both "so damned special." Warren's reply had been, "Yes... We're both persecuted minorities." Warren says that he had made the comment as a joke, but he then adds the searching question, "But had I?"

Actually, in reading Warren's writings one discovers that there are two Southern white viewpoints toward the Negro. One viewpoint can be termed the old stereotype of "Sambo." The Sambo image maintains that the Negroes are happy the way things are and want to be left alone. Warren writes that Sambo was the supine, grateful, humble, irresponsible, unmanly, banjo-picking, servile, grinning, slack-jawed, docile, dependent, slow-witted, humorous, spiritual, singing, blamelessly fornicating, happy-go-lucky, hedonistic, faithful black servitor who sometimes might step out of character long enough to utter folk wisdom or bury the family silver to save it from the Yankees. Sambo was the comforting stereotype the Southern white man had of the Negro.

The second viewpoint is that regardless of the Negro's position--slave, segregated, or desegregated--he is able to rise above his apparent inequalities. This second viewpoint accounts for slave insurrections, the success of slaves in escaping and running away, the Negro's sly mannerisms, and the Negro's covert cunning. Although there is much of Sambo in Warren's literature, he seems more interested in

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15Warren, p. 27.
16Warren, p. 27.
17Warren, p. 27.
19Warren, pp. 52-53.
stressing the second viewpoint: the Negro is capable of taking care of himself regardless of his position in society.

From his first book, *John Brown*, until the end of his latest book, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, Warren remains a white Southerner. According to evidence drawn from his creation of characters in fiction and his comments in his non-fiction, Warren seems to stress that the white Southerner is best able to understand and to advise the Negro and that the Southerner has the most concern for the Negro as a human being. The Northerner is too idealistic and really has little desire for improvement of the Negro's position in society, at least not in the North. Warren also believes that even though the Negro has a position inferior to that of the white man, he is able to counteract the limitations placed upon him.
CHAPTER 2

WARREN'S SOUTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO

The Southern white has always longed to believe that he has been the benevolent keeper of the Negro, and there is considerable evidence in Warren's writings to support a benevolent-keeper belief. Warren shows that many slave masters had a deep sense of loyalty toward their slaves. They were reluctant to sell a useless slave. This sense of loyalty of the Southern white for the Negro did not end after the Civil War. In his novels with contemporary settings, Warren points out that the Southern white today still continues to support and care for the Negro long after the Negro has lost his economic value.

Warren emphasizes that the Negro slave in the South lived in a kindly society. He writes that although "slavery was a feature monstrous...in theory," slavery was, "more often than not, humane in practice."¹ This represents Warren's viewpoint and the Southern white viewpoint.

In Band of Angels Amantha's father, Mr. Starr, is loved and is respected by his slaves. Amantha remembers cornhuskings when the slaves from several farms would gather to do the huskings. Following the husking, the Negroes would have an evening of entertainment provided by the master whose corn was being shucked. During one husking, Amantha says, "All the people [slaves] ran at my father, and grabbed him,

lifting him high above me...jubilating and yelling...my father was laughing."²

After Amantha has attended Oberlin School and has been influenced by the Abolitionists, she asks her father to free his slaves. He refuses because there would be no place for the slaves to go. He says plainly, "Gre't God,...Where would they go?...I'd have to take care of 'em anyway...I haven't got that much money."³

Amantha's father does not sell Shaddy. He gives Shaddy to a slave trader. Shaddy must be removed because he represents a threat to Amantha. Amantha's father tells her, "Sometimes...Honey...you have to do things.″⁴ Amantha says that "Shaddy had not been whipped...My father was a humane man, and in the years of my recollection he had never had to sell off a soul. In fact, selling your people was against his principles. But with Shaddy he presumably felt that he had no choice."⁵

At her father's funeral when Amantha discovers she has Negro blood, the Sheriff is most reluctant to give her to Cy, the white man who holds the mortgage on Mr. Starr's property, but the Sheriff must do so because it is the law. The Sheriff asks her if her father left her any papers. "Didn't he ever give you papers....think hard....you don't find them papers and I gotta do something I won't like, and you

⁴Warren, p. 34.
⁵Warren, pp. 16-17.
won't either. ...I got to go by my warrant."\(^6\)

The Southern white knew that slavery meant selling, but Warren indicates that the actual selling was restrained and limited. Cy says it plainly, "A nigger is what you kin sell,"\(^7\) but Warren excuses Cy because Cy is of the "poor-white trash" class and therefore not educated to treat the Negro properly. Yet even Cy feels guilty about selling Amantha. He says to her, "Maybe hit won't be so bad...ain't nothin' lasts ferer."\(^8\)

Yet in spite of what Warren reveals as the white's benevolent treatment of the Negro, he implies that the Southern white has always been burdened with a sense of guilt. In *Band of Angels*, Mr. Starr is aware of a guilt-feeling when he discusses selling slaves, and Hamish Bond buys Amantha because he is aware of a guilt-feeling when he sees her mistreated at the slave auction. As Maxwell Geismar has pointed out, Bond also feels guilty about his part in the African slave trade and adopts an African Negro, Rau-Ru, who guards Bond's plantation.\(^9\)

Bond, after buying Amantha, treats her in a benevolent manner. During the Civil War, he gives Amantha her freedom and provides her with a small apartment and some money. He later comes to New Orleans and asks her to marry him.

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\(^6\)Warren, p. 58.

\(^7\)Warren, p. 65.

\(^8\)Warren, p. 66.

An admission of guilt is evident when Warren discusses the Negro's legal rights in the South. He shows that he is well aware both of the history of legal injustice to the Negro and the Southern white's consciousness of it.

Warren also dealt with the burden of guilt the Southern white felt about owning and selling slaves. In All the King's Men, an important segment tells the story of Cass Mastern's mistress, Annabelle Trice, who is the wife of a wealthy plantation owner. After her husband commits suicide because he has discovered his wife's infidelity, Annabelle learns that her personal maid, Phebe, knows of her involvement with Cass. She sells Phebe to a slave trader who takes her down river to be sold. Cass discovers the sale of Phebe and though she was not his property, he is shocked by the injustice to Phebe which has stemmed from his illicit affair with Annabelle. To assuage his guilt, he tries to find Phebe and give her her freedom. Because Cass is unable to find her, he returns home and frees his slaves. For awhile he tries to run his plantation with his freed slaves but is unsuccessful.

One of Cass's freed Negroes steals his slave wife from a plantation near by and runs away. The Negro is killed resisting arrest and his wife is returned. Cass's brother remarks, "All you have managed to do is get one nigger killed and one nigger whipped." Remorsefully, Cass sends the rest of his Negroes North. He admits that the Negroes were passing from one misery to another, and that the hopes they now carried for freedom were false but his own guilt remains.

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Warren recognized that the white Southerner did sometimes mistreat his slaves. When this happens Warren tries to justify the behavior of the white Southerner. In *Brother to Dragons*, Aunt Cat, Lilburn's black mammy, tries to console Lilburn when Lilburn's mother dies. Aunt Cat reminds Lilburn that even though his mother is dead, he had nursed milk from her, Aunt Cat, too.\(^\text{11}\) Lilburn says, "I sucked your milk...but now I'd puke it out, the last black drop..."\(^\text{12}\) Aunt Cat continues to console Lilburn by putting her hands on him, but he jerks back and says, "Take your black hands off...What's yours in me, I'll spit out!"\(^\text{13}\) Warren comments that "Cat...cried...it hurt her so."\(^\text{14}\)

Yet he attempts to justify Lilburn's treatment of Aunt Cat. Warren implies that Aunt Cat had always fought to gain the love that Lilburn had for his mother. In her way, Aunt Cat asked for Lilburn's cruelty. Warren says Aunt Cat "loved him \(\sqrt{\text{Lilburn}}\) sure. But...even love's a weapon....Let's take the situation. Now anybody raised down ....South will know in his bones what that situation was. For all those years Aunt Cat had fought in silence for Lilburn's love, for possession of her chile, with the enemy, the rival, Lilburn's mother."\(^\text{15}\)

Warren continues to build sympathy for the white Lilburn when

\(^\text{12}\)Warren, p. 90.
\(^\text{13}\)Warren, pp. 90-91.
\(^\text{14}\)Warren, p. 91.
\(^\text{15}\)Warren, p. 91.
later Lilburn turns in wrath on his slaves. The Negroes antagonize Lilburn. Objects belonging to his mother mysteriously disappear. His wife, Laetitia, is very ill, and his marital relationship with her has been unsatisfactory. The crops fail. These incidents and his mother's death prey on his mind. In an act of desperation, Lilburn butchers his slave, George.

Warren says Lilburn killed George because Lilburn was obsessed by his mother's death. Lilburn's last words before he kills George are, "But now's the last black son-of-a-bitching hand to ever... make my mother grieve." His first words after killing George again suggest that he killed George out of love for Lucy, his mother. He says, "You Niggers stop that racket. Or if you got to pray, you better pray Dear God will help keep count on my mother's spoons and you won't break cups, or tear a sheet she lay on."

However cruel to his slaves Lilburn seems, Warren refers to him again and again as "poor Lilburn," and Warren condemns President Jefferson's idealism in rejecting Lilburn.

Warren's novel At Heaven's Gate again pictures a white Southerner, Uncle Lew, unkind toward a Negro, but Warren is careful to describe Uncle Lew as a deformed and embittered old man. Lew is jealous of the Murdock family because the Murdock family is wealthy and has many Negro servants. Lew mutters about the Murdock's "educated niggers" and

16Warren, p. 130.
17Warren, p. 141.
enjoys teasing the Negro children. When Anse, Murdock's Negro servant is accused of killing Sue, Murdock's daughter, Lew becomes elated and excited and assures everyone that "it serves 'em right, by God!"

A part of the Southern white's attitude was his loyalty toward and love for his Negro slaves and servants. In At Heaven's Gate Warren contrasts Jerry's father's treatment of the Negro to Uncle Lew's. Old Callie has been a Negro servant in Jerry's home for many years. Jerry comments that even "at her best Callie was not a good servant, and as the years passed, she grew more and more incompetent." Yet, Jerry's father would not fire Callie. He claimed that Callie was just getting old, and she had been with them for a long time. Jerry's father also kept Ben, another Negro who had grown old and could no longer work. When Jerry tells his father to get rid of Callie and Ben, his father replies, "It ain't that easy, son....It just ain't that easy."

In Warren's short story "Blackberry Winter," the narrator, a young white boy, describes his feelings toward Old Jebb, a Negro who lived on the farm. The boy says that Old Jebb "was a good man, and I loved him next to my mother and father."

In "Prime Leaf" Warren again shows the affection of the white

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20 Warren, p. 359.
21 Warren, p. 49.
22 Warren, p. 50.
Southerner for the Negro. Mr. Hardin, who has been busy tracking down "Night-Riders," comes home and finds Negro Sam, who is supposed to be standing watch at the barn, asleep. Mr. Hardin wakes Sam gently and then tells him to go back to sleep and he will continue the watch. Mr. Hardin says to him, "I reckon I ain't sleepy abit. ...You can do some more of your...napping."  

In Who Speaks for the Negro? Warren comments that his father would always say, "If you treat a Negro right, he'll treat you right." Warren also tells that during the depression when the Warren family was poor, his father did not evict a Negro renter, because, as he said, "You can't do that to a man who has no place to go."  

Warren also deals with the poor white Southern point of view. The Reconstruction period following the Civil War, the early twenties, and the depression era all left the South in economic crisis. The poor Southern white worker had to compete with the Negro for jobs. Therefore, the poor Southern white became resentful of the cheap, Negro labor force. In his essay "Toward Agrarianism," Warren writes that the Negro is often "exploited as cheap labor, and because he competes with the poor whites for jobs and forces them to work for almost nothing...  

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25 Warren, p. 244.  
27 Warren, p. 11.
he [the Negro] becomes the target of their [the poor Whites] hatred and violence."\(^\text{28}\)

In *All the King's Men*, when Willie tries to get the town to take the low construction bid for a new school the townspeople object because Jeffers, the low bidder, uses Negro workers. Pillsbury says that "Jeffers uses...Negroes...and worse; some of the Negroes would be getting better pay"\(^\text{29}\) because they were skilled laborers. One of the local men says that they "couldn't save enuff to pay fer bringin' no passel of niggers in here....putten white folks out of work."\(^\text{30}\)

In *Night Rider* the tobacco farm owners were often threatened because they used Negro tenant farmers for cheap labor. Mr. Murdock receives an anonymous letter warning him to replace his Negro workers with white men, but Mr. Murdock refuses, and his barn is burned.\(^\text{31}\) Later a gang of men take Mr. Elkin, whip him, and dynamite his house because Mr. Elkin keeps his Negro tenants.\(^\text{32}\) Mr. Munn too receives an anonymous letter. It says, "We done told you twict to throw them niggers off yore place and put some white min on...We give you three days to git shet of them black bastuds."\(^\text{33}\) Mr. Munn's house too is


\(^{29}\) Warren, *All the King's Men*, p. 60.

\(^{30}\) Warren, p. 50.


\(^{32}\) Warren, p. 334.

\(^{33}\) Warren, p. 306.
Warren says that even today it is a shock to the white Southerner to see "in Marietta, Georgia, the biggest single airplane factory in the world employs...Negro engineers, mathematicians and technicians, and more horrendously, employs Negro foremen bossing white workers."34 Warren says that "such items are even more shocking to many white Southerners than the discovery that Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James E. Chany had really been butchered and buried under the dam, and had not run off and hidden just to get publicity, as Neshoba County Sheriff L. A. Rainey had chosen to believe....It is not evil that shocks, it is the unexpected."35

Warren realizes also that justice was frequently denied the Negro in the South. He admits that in a court of law the Negro often is denied a fair trial. As early as the essay "The Briar Patch," he says that "at present the Negro frequently fails to get justice....It will be a happy day for the South when no court discriminates in its dealings between the Negro and the White man."36

Again, in At Heaven's Gate, Anse, the Negro servant, is falsely accused of killing Sue Murdock although there is little evidence that Anse killed Sue. Jerry asks Duckfoot if he thinks Anse killed Sue and Duckfoot answers, "I don't think it was the nigger. But, it will be

the nigger that hangs." Warren points out that it is difficult for the Southern white to accept the law because he has been taught since birth "that the Supreme Court was not the law of the land." In The Legacy of the Civil War, Warren says that the Southern leaders consider the South to be in the right in the legalistic sense even though the South lost the military issue. Therefore, even after the Southern defeat, the South refused to change, even to change gradually. Warren says that "the South developed 'The Great Alibi' which excuses everything, even laziness, hate, and prejudice, since they feel that they are victims of history." In Night Rider when Mr. Munn clears Bunk Trevely an of a murder charge, Mr. Munn is convinced that Trevely an is innocent and the Negro is guilty. When Joe Means congratulates Mr. Munn for winning the case, Joe comments, "That's what I always say... just get you a good lawyer and he'll find you a good nigger to hang it on." Warren writes that "Mr. Munn did not laugh." Mr. Munn points out the evidence that the Negro had the knife and the watch, and Mr. Munn is confident of the Negro's guilt. Later, when Mr. Munn discovers that Trevely an was guilty and not the Negro, he is deeply troubled. At the end of the novel when

37Warren, At Heaven's Gate, p. 361.
38Warren, Who Speaks for the Negro?, p. 84.
40Warren, Night Rider, p. 81.
41Warren, p. 81.
Mr. Munn is alone and is evading the law, Warren writes that Mr. Munn "would think of that Negro man, the one who had had the knife, Trevelyan's knife. The knife which the Negro had found under the corncrib... The Negro standing there in the pale lamplight, his voice pouring out... he had never said much at his trial, had just sat there. And afterward in the jail, till they hanged him. Mr. Munn tried hard to remember his name." 42

Warren writes that Sylvester Purtle, the Sheriff in Flood had been Sheriff for twenty years, and he had been noted for his fairness. Yet once Purtle tried to save a Negro from a mob, and Purtle was beaten by the mob. As soon as Purtle was well, he arrested the man who had beaten him, but a white jury acquitted the accused man. 43

In Wilderness, Jedeen Hawksworth goes into a court to testify that a Negro boy had not struck his white owner because the Negro could not give testimony, but Hawksworth's word had no effect. The innocent Negro boy was convicted and hanged. 44

Thus Warren is well aware both of the history of legal injustice to the Negro in the South and the white Southerner's consciousness of it. He shows the attitude of the white to be a combination of benevolence and guilt, of love and injustice and economic competition.

42 Warren, p. 392.
CHAPTER 3

WARREN'S NORTHERN WHITE AND THE NEGRO

While Warren illustrates the Southern white's deep concern for the well-being of the Negro and provides "alibis" for the Southern white when he mistreats the Negro, he describes the Northern whites as either too idealistic or too prejudiced or too hypocritical as far as the welfare of the Negro is concerned. He shows that at the time of the Civil War many Northerners though they disapproved of the institution of slavery, they were not willing to go to war to free the slaves. Even Northern abolitionists who favored freeing the Negro were not willing to accept him socially nor to grant him sufferage in the North. Following the Civil War the Northern states still denied the Negro sufferage. Northern industries and Northern suburbs today do not welcome the Negro any more than the South does. Warren stresses in his latest book, Who Speaks for the Negro? that the North must share the responsibility for the present Negro Revolution.¹

In The Legacy of the Civil War, Warren analyzes the causes and consequences of the Civil War. According to him one of the causes of the Civil War was the Northern abolitionist's inability to compromise. The Northern abolitionists believed they were following the will of God. As a result, they believed they fought a war for the freedom of slaves, for human freedom.

But in *Band of Angels* and *All the King's Men*, Warren shows a different picture of the Northern abolitionist. In *Band of Angels* he presents the abolitionists as idealists who are ignorant of the white Southerner's way of life and who are ignorant of the Negro's position in Southern society. When Amantha attends school at Oberlin, she is questioned by her abolitionist schoolmates. Once she tells Seth Parton, Ellie and other schoolmates about the cornhusking parties held on her father's farm for the Negroes. Ellie and Seth twist Amantha's words. Ellie claims Mr. Starr gave the slaves whiskey to make them work at night.\(^2\) Seth Parton replies, "We must never be deceived by incidental virtue."\(^3\) Another girl adds, "He rode on their shoulders...shoulders of men."\(^4\) Later, Seth Parton marries another pious abolitionist, Hannah Schmidt. But Parton, who is so pious an abolitionist, apparently suffers no guilt when he leaves Hannah and carries on an illicit affair with Miss Idell. Warren's picture of the abolitionist here is not sympathetic.

Nor did he believe the Northerner understood the Negro's position. Warren shows the inability of the Northerner to adjust to the relationship of the Negro in the South. In *All the King's Men* he describes Caroline, a lady from Boston. Her cruelty surpassed that of the Southern white. Warren writes that Caroline had "been nurtured in sentiments opposed to the institution of human servitude," but when


\(^3\)Warren, p. 36.

\(^4\)Warren, p. 37.
Caroline married a Southerner, she not only kept slaves, but she also treated the slaves cruelly\textsuperscript{5}—that she quickly became "notorious for her abominable cruelties...Once while she was engaged in flogging a servant...a small Negro boy entered the room and began to whimper. She...hurled him through the window...and broke his back."\textsuperscript{6}

In *The Legacy of the Civil War*, Warren says that the Northerners tend "to rewrite history to suit their own needs."\textsuperscript{7} The North tends to see itself as freeing the slaves, and the North tends to forget that the Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery only in the South.\textsuperscript{8} Tobias Sears, in *Band of Angels*, begins to recognize the idealistic thinking of the North. Tobias hears Colonel Morton, another Northerner, arguing for limited suffrage for the Negro. Morton tells Tobias that "More won't stick...not when half the states up North don't give 'em the vote at all."\textsuperscript{9} Seth Parton agrees that there should be complete suffrage. Seth claims that "in the North there is enough virtue to permit self-reformation, but...we must enforce virtue" in the South.\textsuperscript{10} The Northern Seth fails to acknowledge that it is the Northern Army which is in control of Louisiana, and that Northern businessmen are using the Negro in a new, but legal, kind of slavery.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5}Warren, *All the King's Men*, p. 183.
\item \textsuperscript{6}Warren, p. 183.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Warren, pp. 62-63.
\item \textsuperscript{9}Warren, *Band of Angels*, p. 258.
\item \textsuperscript{10}Warren, p. 258.
\end{itemize}
Colonel Morton tells Tobias about a Northern officer who leased two thousand acres of confiscated Southern land from the Federal government, got Negroes from the government for eight dollars a month, and became rich in a short time. Tobias himself sees the Negro being obviously exploited by the Northerners. Tobias tells Amantha that the abolitionists "promised...virtue....We went out to do fine things...but we had not purged our own soul." 

Amantha Starr reports the results of the Fourteenth Amendment which the Northern congress supported.

The Amendment didn't give the Negro the vote, but it was understood that it would get him the vote in the Rebel states. Failure to ratify, failure to give the vote, would mean the refusal of Congress to admit representatives. The happy fate of Tennessee made that clear. Tennessee ratified immediately and immediately in July, her representatives were seated in Washington.

But in Louisiana it was different. The Legislature wasn't in session. No special session was called. The Democrats didn't want a special session because they still hoped, perhaps, that President Johnson would win, that the West would help him, that the Fourteenth Amendment would fail of general ratification. As for the Radicals, at least most of them, they didn't want a special session either, for ratification would, presumably, leave the present incumbents in office in the state.

No, they had a bolder plan. They would cut the present government off, root and branch, and cast it into the fire.

In Who Speaks for the Negro?, Warren again emphasizes that the Negro was not given the franchise in the Northern states. Even after the Civil War, Connecticut, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Kansas voted


12Warren, p. 294.

13Warren, p. 294.
to deny Negro suffrage.

While interviewing a white Southerner for his book Segregation, Warren uncovered more justification for the white Southerner's resentment of the Northerner. The Southerner told Warren that "he [the Southerner] remembers that in the days when Federal bayonets supported the black Reconstruction state governments in the South, not a single Negro held office in any Northern state." 14

In Wilderness, Warren emphasizes that many Northerners were not willing to fight to free the Negroes. He describes the conscription riots of 1862-63. When Adam arrives in Boston, he sees a dead Negro hanging on a lamp post. The Negro's clothing has been slashed, his flesh has been scored with gashes, and his fingers and toes have been cut off. In a few moments Adam is caught up in an angry mob and pushed into a cellar already full of Negroes who have been left to drown. 15 Adam later learns from his uncle, Aaron Blaustein, that the mob was composed of Northerners, not Southern rebels. Blaustein tells Adam that the mob had been protesting the new conscription law and had "gutted conscription offices, ...killed police, fought the Union troops, and looted and burned a big part of town." 16 According to Blaustein, the rich Northerners "buy out of conscription and stay home and get richer." 17

14Warren, Segregation, p. 94.
16Warren, p. 69.
This fact is again emphasized in Wilderness when Jed Hawksworth remarks that the Yankees are in no hurry to fight. Jed says, "Looks like they gonna let this durn war last till Hell is froze over."\(^{18}\) Mose replies, "Aint hurten you...the longer they fights, the more you kin sell 'em."\(^{19}\)

According to Warren, Northern states were willing to use the Negroes in the Union Army, but the Negroes were given the unpleasant work. Mose, a Negro in Wilderness, tells Adam, "They use us colored ...fer diggen...diggen...big privies. Then putten dirt back in when them privies was nigh full. Diggen up stumps. Diggen up rock. Diggen for roads. Diggen in the rain. Diggen in the snow....All a nigger good fer. Diggen."\(^{20}\) Mose claims he could have fought as hard as anyone if he had had a chance.

Warren shows that the Union Army placed inferior officers in charge of Negro troops. The white Union officer in Wilderness complains that he had never wanted a black commission. "He had been refused three times, so he took the examination for a black commission."\(^{21}\)

The Union troops not only left the unpleasant work to the Negro troops, but they also enjoyed humiliating the Negroes. For entertainment, Simms Purdew, a white Union officer, put money in the bottom of a washtub. Purdew then covered the money with "twenty inches of flour and

\(^{18}\text{Warren, p. 131.}\)
\(^{19}\text{Warren, p. 131.}\)
\(^{20}\text{Warren, p. 220.}\)
\(^{21}\text{Warren, p. 212.}\)
encouraged five Negroes, with hands tied behind their backs, to risk suffocation in rooting for the wealth." 22

Warren also emphasizes that the Northerners did not pay the Negro on a scale equal to the white. Mose tells Adam that Jed Hawksworth is not paying them the same wages. 23 Later Mose tells Adam, "I could of learned to fight. Even if they didn't pay a nigger but half what they pay a sodjer what is white." 24

The point is that the Northerner, in Warren's view, was no more willing to accept the Negro socially than the Southerner. In Wilderness Jed Hawksworth is offered a drink of liquor from a Dr. Sulgrave's jug. Jed remarks that the liquor is good and adds, "I'm sure you want my nigger to have him a snort...." 25 Dr. Sulgrave lets Mose have a drink, but before Dr. Sulgrave takes a drink himself he "surreptitiously wiped the nipple of the jug on the sleeve of his coat." 26

Later, in Wilderness, the Union troops are enjoying watching the camp prostitute get beaten. One of the Union soldiers notices Mose watching. The soldier looks at Mose and says, "God durn you-What you doing here....he seized Mose by the shoulder....You ain't got no right-a-God-durn nig standing here and that woman white...." 27

22 Warren, p. 184.  
23 Warren, p. 23.  
24 Warren, p. 220.  
25 Warren, p. 142.  
26 Warren, p. 142.  
27 Warren, pp. 206-207.
In his later writing *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, Warren is equally critical of the North. In Vermont Warren talks with a student who has just graduated from the University of Vermont. The student tells Warren about a contest called "Walken fer de Cake." "Walken fer de Cake" is "the name of an annual festival....Each fraternity enters a team of two dancers, dressed up in flamboyant tail-coats of bright silk and satin and wearing top hats-in blackface. Each pair does a furious and complicated buck-and-wing, in unison. The victory in this is glory for the sponsoring fraternity."28 But one of the few Negro students at the university objected to the "Walken fer de Cake" contest and wrote a letter of protest to the university paper. The NAACP threatened to send pickets and the fraternity council had to give up the contest.

The student Warren was interviewing remarked that "it made the alumni all over the state awful sore.... Why, up at UVM, that's the big thing of the year....it's not race prejudices-not in Vermont-it's just a tradition....they don't have any Negro problem in Vermont."29

Warren continues to explain Vermont's position on race prejudice. Warren writes that Brattleboro, Vermont, won an award for the "All American City" given by the National Municipal League and Look magazine. Yet the local Brattleboro newspaper was quick to veto Senator Russell's proposal to redistribute the Negro population of the United States. The paper's editor called Senator Russell's plan "short-sighted, impractical and cynical....why...Vermont...would stand to accept 40,000 Negroes--


29Warren, p. 43.
most of whom would come here without the least idea of what the climate is like and most of whom would be miserable."\textsuperscript{30}

Sarcastically, Warren points out that "Vermont has no Negro problem. Furthermore, Vermont does not intend to have any."\textsuperscript{31} Warren is critical of what he feels is the hypocrisy of the Northern white.

\textsuperscript{30}Warren, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{31}Warren, p. 43.
CHAPTER 4

WARREN’S IMAGE OF THE NEGRO

According to many of the pictures of the Negro seen in Warren's fiction, in his non-fiction, and in his poetry, the Negro has a child-like disposition and an inferior mental capacity. Warren pictures the Negro as possessing a limited and unresourceful mind. Furthermore, in Warren's writings, the Negro himself often accepts the idea of his mental inferiority and resents the Negro who has accepted the white man's culture.

Yet, even though Warren depicts the Negro as being literally inferior to the white, he more often shows the Negro as having a sly, deceptive nature. This sly, deceptive nature has made it possible for the Negro to circumvent the degrading position of his race. It is his means of living successfully with his situation.

Even in slavery, the Negro developed a sly cunning. He learned to quietly sabotage the white man and to undermine the white man's power. Warren often speaks of the Negro's staring eyes, his soft feet, and his gossiping tongue. He also speaks specifically of the Negro's covert cunning and of his clever ability to pit one white man against another. This chapter will analyze these various images of the Negro in Warren's writings.

Warren's characterization of the Negro frequently indicates his inferior ability. In his Civil War novel Wilderness, he implies the low mental capacity of the Negro. When Adam tries to teach Mose, a Negro, to print, Warren suggests Mose is incapable of learning. Warren
shows Mose at a table copying letters from some letter-cards Adam has made. Mose asks Adam, "How dat?" and Adam replies, "Fine." But Adam "shivers at the falsity of his tone."\(^1\)

Warren again implies the Negro's limited learning capacity in his novel *All the King's Men* when Willie Stark tells how hard he had studied to pass the state-bar examination. Willie recalls, "Me sitting up there bearing down on those books, and then they gave me those crappy questions. A corn-field nigger could have answered them if he'd been able to spell."\(^2\)

In Warren's poetry, also, there is implication of the Negro's mental inferiority. The buzzards, in the poem "Pondy Woods," suggest that the Negro is not as capable of abstract thought as the white. The buzzards see a runaway Negro who is evading a posse and comment, "Nigger, your breed ain't metaphysical."\(^3\)

A similar suggestion of the unsophisticated nature of the Negro is seen in Warren's essay "The Briar Patch." Warren writes that the Negro "has always been a creature of the small town and farm. That is where he still chiefly belongs, by temperament and capacity...."\(^4\)

When a Negro character has achieved scholastic success, Warren is quick to include a reason for the success. The implication is

\(^2\)Warren, *All the King's Men*, pp. 67-68.
usually the infusion of white blood. In At Heaven's Gate, Anse Jackson, a Negro has made intellectual progress, and Warren subtly describes Anse as having "definitely Negroid features but a skin considerably paler than chocolate."

Along with his suggestions of the Negro's intellectual inferiority, Warren indicates that the Negro needs and wants the white man's help to manage simple problems. Viola, the Allen's Negro maid, lives with another Negro family. The Negro family comes to the Allens and tells them "you tell her [Viola] she's gotta go. I ain't having nobody laying up in the bed in my house....you gotta tell...." Not only does Warren's Negro need and want the white man's aid, but he also has a genuine love for the white man. When the small Negro boys tease old Murdock, Old Anse, the Negro, makes the boys stop, and Old Anse calms Murdock. Another picture of devotion is seen when Bradwell, Tolliver's father, runs into the swamp to escape from the realities of civilization. Zack, an old Negro goes along. Bradwell discovers his father in the swamp with Zack. Old Tolliver has been crying and drinking. Zack tells Bradwell that his father "can't he'p it," and Jack notices that Zack has been keeping the flies off his father. Bradwell says, "That willow branch keeping the flies off hadn't

5Warren, At Heaven's Gate, p. 176.
6Warren, "Her Own People," from The Circus in the Attic and Other Stories, p. 189.
7Warren, At Heaven's Gate, pp. 263-266.
missed a beat, but Zack looked pretty gone.\(^8\) The Negro's love for the white man is also shown in *All the King's Men*. One of the slaves gives his gun, "an old musket barrel strapped with metal to a piece of cypress rail crooked at one end," to the Confederate Army.\(^9\)

According to Warren, the inferior Negro is often resentful of the Negro who has succeeded in bettering himself. This implies that the Negro accepts himself as inferior. In *Band of Angels*, when Shaddy, a Negro, tries to escape from the slave trader, it is the slaves who enjoy beating Shaddy into submission. Warren writes, "I imagine that the field-hands...laid on a lick or two with a premium of enthusiasm."\(^10\) Shaddy is a cobbler and the work-hands are jealous of Shaddy's position above theirs on the farm. Shaddy does not have to depend on Saturday rations because he is skilled labor.\(^11\)

In "Her Own People," Warren again illustrates the unwillingness of the Negro to accept a Negro who has achieved success. Viola, the Allen's Negro maid, has better clothing than the members of a Negro family she lives with. When Viola cannot get along with the Negro family, Mr. Allen says that "the trouble is...that Viola is a white-folks nigger."\(^12\) Warren writes in "Blackberry Winter" that Dellie and Jebb "kept everything nice around their cabin....Dellie and Jebb were

\(^8\)Warren, *Flood*, p. 119.
\(^9\)Warren, *All the King's Men*, p. 185.
\(^12\)Warren, "Her Own People," p. 178.
what they used to call 'white-folks Niggers,' but when little Jebb, their son, grew up, he killed a man and was sent to the penitentiary.\textsuperscript{13} Warren explains that little Jebb "probably grew up to be mean... from just being picked on so much by the children of the other tenants, who were jealous of Jebb and Dellie for being thrifty and clever and being white-folks' niggers."\textsuperscript{14}

Even in \textit{Who Speaks for the Negro?}, the reader notices numerous remarks concerning the Negro who had made progress by the white man's standards. Frequently one reads that such a Negro "has sold out, is an Uncle Tom, is a 'white-folks' nigger."\textsuperscript{15}

As a result of white man's presumption of Negro's inferiority, the Negro too has grown to accept himself as innately inferior to the white man. Consequently, he has developed an indifferent, easy-going, and sometimes cowardly nature. When Mr. Munn, in \textit{Night Rider}, questions an old Negro as to where the Negro got a knife resembling the murder weapon, the old Negro looks down at the knife and childishly replies, "Boss... and his tongue licked out... to wet his lips a sudden childish and innocent pink, boss, a great-big ole bullfrog done found me that-air knife."\textsuperscript{16} This view of the childishness of the Negro is also seen in \textit{All the King's Men}. The Negroes working in the field hear an automobile screech on the highway. Warren writes, "Then a nigger chopping

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\item[14] Warren, p. 86.
\end{footnotes}
cotton a mile away, he'll look up...and he'll say, 'Lawd God,' and the first nigger will giggle." This same childlike indifference is illustrated in Flood. Brad and Leontine are speeding down the highway. "They come over a rise, and at ninety almost pile into a wagon and team going in their direction at a mean speed of a mile and a half an hour." A Chevrolet is coming from the opposite direction. Brad manages "to squeak through just as the space opened between the left rear wheel of the wagon and the left rear fender of the Chevrolet." Warren says, "As they whipped through, the old Negro man on the wagon board...looked out at them with profound unconcern."18

In "Prime Leaf" Warren describes the immature behavior of the Negro. The Negroes are standing by the platform of a railroad station. When the train leaves, one of the Negroes, "in a deep melancholy voice, mocks the OO-oo, OO-oo," sound of the distant train whistle. Then the other Negroes begin to laugh.19

In addition to being indifferent, easy-going and childlike, the Negro is also a coward. In Wilderness, Dr. Sulgrave says to Mose, "Looks like you'd a-been here. They was fighting over you niggers. Looks like you might of give a hand. You look stout." Mose replies, "I got a bad back." Later Mose is recognized by a lieutenant of the Union Army. The lieutenant says, "why...you're...Mose Crawfurd....

17Warren, All the King's Men, p. 1.


and you ran off." Then Jeden makes Mose strip his pants, and there is "a big W" on Mose's thigh. Jeden triumphantly remarks, "That's what the Yankees put on...a soldier that ain't worth a damn."20 In "When the Light Gets Green" the young boy remembers his grandfather telling about capturing Fort Pillow and the drunk niggers. He remembers his grandfather saying that "niggers couldn't stand a charge...."21

Although Warren's Negro characters frequently possess a childlike disposition and an inferior learning capacity, they more often reveal a sly cunning which they cleverly use to rise above the inequalities of their slave and master relationship. In Brother to Dragons, Warren analyzes rather extensively their sly cunning. Following Lilburn's mother's death, Lilburn treats his slaves with unusual cruelty. The slaves, in return, deliberately begin to get even with Lilburn. Lilburn's mother's cups are broken and spoons are missing. Warren speaking as a character within the poem, says that "Violence breeds cunning, and cunning violence." Lilburn comes to the kitchen and asks to see his mother's cups and spoons. Each time Lilburn comes one more cup or spoon is missing.22

Later, during the night that Lilburn butchers his slave George, Laetitia, Lilburn's wife, is awakened by a cry and further frightened by an earthquake. Laetitia faints at the top of the stairs, and Lilburn


22Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 105.
finds her and carries her back to bed. The next morning when Laetitia awakens, she is confused as to what has happened. Aunt Cat cunningly persuades Laetitia to escape to her brother's place. Speaking for himself in the poem, Warren asks Laetitia how she was able to escape. Laetitia replies, "You know how colored folks are, just like children. Be nice to them, and they'll be nice to you....It was Aunt Cat who made me get away....She helped me get away, she loved me so much."

But Warren explains Aunt Cat's motive differently. He suggests Aunt Cat's motive was revenge. Warren says to Laetitia, "She [Aunt Cat] loved you so much, yes, that's one way to put it. Or hated them, for that's another way." Warren says that Aunt Cat sends Laetitia, who is ill and uncertain and frightened because of the incident of the previous night, to Laetitia's brother because Aunt Cat "knew Laetitia was the...one weapon she had....So Aunt Cat sent her [Laetitia] to her brother...in terror with no word of fact....She knew the simple classic formula: Divide the white folks and sit back and wait."

Laetitia's brother comes quickly to Lilburn's estate and demands to know what has scared Laetitia. Lilburn calls Aunt Cat to explain Laetitia's fright. Aunt Cat cleverly tortures Lilburn by coming close several times to telling what has happened to George. Aunt Cat says she heard somebody yell, but when Lilburn becomes angry, Aunt Cat says it was an owl that made the noise. "He scritch agin," she said, "and then hit come!" Lilburn angrily asks Aunt Cat, "What came?" Aunt Cat

23 Warren, pp. 52-55.
24 Warren, p. 57.
slyly answers, "Why, Honey, nothin....Just the ole yearthquake." Warren comments that "Cat now tortured Lilburn for her sport. Just teetered on the verge of dire revelation, then caught her balance: gist the old yearthquake."\(^{25}\)

The following spring one of Lilburn's dogs uncovers one of George's bones, and a man passing by picks up the bone and gives it to the Sheriff. The Sheriff recognizes the bone as being a human bone and goes out to Lilburn's place. Lilburn denies any knowledge of George's bone. The Sheriff then demands that Lilburn call his slaves, and Lilburn calmly gets his slaves. The Sheriff calls the slaves "a coward passel of niggers," and Lilburn answers "you named 'em what they are....a passel of niggers."\(^ {26}\) Aunt Cat, angered at their remarks, cunningly begins to play upon the superstitious nature of the Negroes and begins to chant, "bones will fly up....them bones will rise. I see them bones, they're flying to the sky!" The other Negroes begin to yell and to cry too. The Negro who had tied George to be butchered runs to the Sheriff and cries out, "Oh, white folks, save me, and I'll show them bones!"\(^ {27}\) Without ever saying directly that Lilburn butchered George, Aunt Cat has proven Lilburn's guilt to the Sheriff.

Warren exhibits further proof of the Negro's cunning in Flood. While attending Fisk University, Mortimer Sparlin, a Negro honor student from Chicago who does not have the typical Southern Negro dialect, works

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\(^{25}\)Warren, p. 25.

\(^{26}\)Warren, p. 157.

\(^{27}\)Warren, p. 158.
week-ends pumping gasoline at The Seven Dwarfs Motel. Bradwell Tolliver drives his Jaguar XK-150 up to the pumps to buy some gasoline. Tolliver begins a conversation with Sparlin and makes fun of Sparlin's motel uniform. Sparlin answers Tolliver with the Southern stereotype Negro politeness. Later Tolliver apologizes to Sparlin for having ridiculed the uniform, and Sparlin answers with a Southern Negro accent and says, "boss,...I doan know whut you mean, True to de Lawd, I doan. White folks....boss, I laks ma pants!" Tolliver is embarrassed and gives Sparlin an extra large tip. Then Tolliver begins to drive away, and in that instant Sparlin triumphantly says, "Thanks, Mac."28

Throughout his writings, Warren inserts subtle passages referring to the Negro's spying eyes, his soft feet, and his gossiping tongue. In the poem Brother to Dragons, Lilburn, the white master, "feels always the eyes that spy." Lilburn's brother-in-law does not like Aunt Cat. She is "just too God-damn sly....peeking at you secret." Even President Jefferson says, in the same poem, that the Negro's eyes "spy from the shadow....They surprise you...with their sly accusation and shuttered gleam." Warren answers Jefferson and says that anyone who lives in the South knows "the intolerable eye of the sly one...."29

The slyness of the Negro's eyes is also shown in All the King's Men when Phebe, Annabelle's maid, discovers Duncan Trice has learned about Cass's and Annabelle's illicit affair, and Duncan has killed himself. Annabelle is alarmed and tells Cass that "Phebe knows and

29Warren, Brother to Dragons, pp. 108-110.
She looks at me--she will always look at me....She will tell them the other slaves...and....all of them...will look at me." Annabelle sells Phebe because Annabelle can not tolerate the way Phebe looks at her.  

Warren also describes the Negro's eyes in several other of his writings. In At Heaven's Gate, Jerry, a white executive engaged to marry the Governor's daughter, Sue, tries to find her after she has run away from him at a country club dance. Jerry asks the Negro maid to go into the dressing room to find Sue. Warren writes "and he looked into her eyes, the furry, chocolatey irises against the floating, oleaginous, yellowish white." In Night Rider, Mr. Munn, a white lawyer, also speaks of the Negro's eyes. When Mr. Munn goes into a Negro's cabin in search of a murder weapon, he becomes aware of a Negro woman's eyes in a darkened corner. He says the woman's eyes "were glinting and dark and steady and not quite human, like the eyes of a nesting bird staring...or the eyes of a rabbit in its form." Warren writes in "Blackberry Winter" that the Negro servant Dellie's eyes were "big" and "the whites surprising and glaring in the black," and in "Prime Leaf" he writes that the Negro's "eye balls were white and wide."

Warren not only points out the spying nature of the Negro's eyes, but he also illustrates the soft, spying nature of the Negro's footsteps.

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30 Warren, All the King's Men, pp. 175-177.
31 Warren, At Heaven's Gate, p. 134.
33 Warren, "Blackberry Winter", p. 79.
In Flood Warren writes, "the Negro woman, soft-footed...came in," and in All the King's Men, Jack hears the Negro "boy's soft feet padding in the hall." In "Prime Leaf" Warren says the "Negro woman padded in from the pantry," and in Brother to Dragons President Jefferson says "their feet come softlier than silence...the foot soundless." Cass Mastern, in All the King's Men, mentions thinking about the "servants walking with soft feet somewhere in the house," and in the same selection, Annabelle remarks that the slaves "feet don't make any noise!" According to Sam Dawson in At Heaven's Gate, Governor Murdock's Negro servant, Anselm, is too "light on his feet." Dawson says Anselm is "Too God-damned light....I like to hear 'em coming." In Who Speaks for the Negro?, Warren describes a Negro receptionist as "wearing no-heel soft golden slippers that make no sound."

Another cunning device used by Warren's Negro is gossip. In Flood "the colored folks talk." In Brother to Dragons, it is Cat's "babble got the gossip started" that sent the Sheriff to investigate.

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35 Warren, Flood, p. 35.
36 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 341.
38 Warren, Brother to Dragons, pp. 108-110.
39 Warren, All the King's Men, pp. 169-170.
40 Warren, p. 175.
43 Warren, Flood, p. 177.
what happened the night George, Lilburn's slave, was murdered. Warren further illustrates the Negro's gossipy nature in Night Rider. Mr. Munn has been having an illicit affair with Lucille. When he asks Lucille to marry him, she puts "her fingers to her lips warningly, and motions... toward the Negro woman in the dining room." This gossiping image of the Negro is also seen in Night Rider when Bunk Trevelyan, a poor white man, is accused of killing his neighbor. Trevelyan tells Mr. Munn, "I didn't pull no trigger... if 'n that durn nigger boy didn't go blabben off his durn mouth about what he seen to some other nigger and that nigger didn't go blabben off his mouth to somebody else, I wouldn't be here now."

Many of the Negro characters in Warren's writings reveal a covert cunning. They are purposely lazy or careless or clumsy in their work. Early in Brother to Dragons, Warren tells about having climbed a brush-tangled hill on the old Lewis Estate in Kentucky. He fought his way through the brush until he came to a carriage road. At first Warren sympathetically remembered that Negroes had had to chop the road from rock, and Warren comments that he hopes the Negroes had not had to make the road in the heat of July. Nevertheless, in the next few lines Warren says that "niggers don't mind heat... and somebody's got to build the road... Did I say road... That's an over-statement... Poor nigger

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44 Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 150.
45 Warren, Night Rider, p. 250.
46 Warren, p. 58.
stonework."47

The deliberate laziness or carelessness of the Negro is seen in other writings of Warren also. In "The Circus in the Attic" he writes that the "Negro woman came...and passed a dust cloth wearily over the furniture in a kind of ritualistic incompetence."48

Early in All the King's Men, Jack Burden tells about sitting in the back room in Slade's bar. Jack describes the sawdust-streaked floor which the Negro man had left when he cleaned the room.49 Later in Adam Stranton's apartment, Jack sees "where...the colored girl had streaked the dust on the furniture."50 Another time in Adam's apartment Jack notices the "old coffee cup with dried dregs inside which the colored girl had forgotten to pick up."51

Not only are Warren's Negro characters lazy and inefficient in their work, but they are also deliberately clumsy. In Night Rider Warren writes that "the Negro woman entered the room...and began clattering, to stack the dishes."52 Warren further emphasizes the Negro's deliberate clumsiness in "Prime Leaf" when "the Negro woman...clumsily removes the dishes, and a Negro boy stacks the dishes with more than

47 Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 47.
49 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 13.
51 Warren, p. 234.
52 Warren, Night Rider, p. 250.
necessary clatter."\(^{53}\)

Although his Negro characters often depict a childlike dependency on the white man and an inferior mental capacity, Warren is more inclined to stress the Negro's sly nature and covert cunning in his relationship to the white man.

Yet in 1956 when Warren wrote *Segregation*, there is a change in his picture of the Negro. The Negro here seems more open and more willing to tell his thoughts to the white. One Negro scholar tells Warren that the "main point is not that he has poor facilities. He is denied human dignity."\(^{54}\) A Negro school inspector says the Negro does not necessarily want to socialize but neither does the Negro want to be insulted.\(^{55}\) A Negro father says he does not necessarily want his son to go to a white school but he would "die for his right to go."\(^{56}\) A Negro college student says his wife is his color and that is the way he wants it.\(^{57}\) And a Mississippi Negro says, "A man tends to want his own kind."\(^{58}\)

In 1956 Warren concludes in *Segregation* that the Negro is not as interested in desegregation as the Negro is in being treated as any


\(^{56}\)Warren, p. 108.

\(^{57}\)Warren, p. 108.

\(^{58}\)Warren, p. 108.
other United States citizen. He stresses that the solution of the Negro problem lies in mutual education for the whites and Negroes, but he admits that a change in thinking will be a slow process. He concludes that in 1956 "gradualism is all you'll get."

By 1965 Warren finds that the Negro has grown restless and more openly militant toward the white. He thinks that one of the Negro's greatest problems today is lack of leadership. There is no one Negro leader today, but rather there are several Negroes who are in position of leadership. In Who Speaks for the Negro? he praises the Negro for a high level of dedication in his fight for equal rights. He says the Negro is now concerned mainly with a relative type of power and is aware of his power and willing to use that power "where it pinches." Although some Negroes resort to militancy, Warren concludes that most Negroes believe they are unable to gain power by gun-force. He quotes the Reverend Ralph Abernathy of SCLC: "The white folks have more guns." Warren comments, "He might have added they have more votes, more money, and more education."

Whitney Young, Jr. of the Urban League says the Negro must have

59 Warren, Segregation, p. 68.
60 Warren, p. 69.
61 Casper, p. 161.
some victories in order to prevent Negro violence. 65 Warren agrees that some of the race violence in the past might have been prevented had white leaders granted the Negro some victories. 66

Young also says that one of the problems of the Negro Revolution today is that white persons confuse Negroes who achieve prominence in any field as Negro race-relation leaders. Cassius Clay and Willie Mays may be Negro leaders, but they are not expert leaders in the race-relations field. 67 Warren comments that the Negro has come a long way in the past decade. A record number of Negroes have registered to vote. Many Negro children now attend unsegregated schools. Some Negroes live in desegregated housing, and many Negroes "feel it is worth while to apply for jobs once considered automatically closed to them." 68

Even though the Negro has made some gains in the last decade, he still has a long road to go before he reaches the living standard of the white. Whitney Young tells Warren that

Twenty percent of all Negro workers are unemployed. Family income for Negroes is fifty-three percent of white income, and the gap is widening. Of 1,000,000 young people (under 21) who are out of school and out of work, fifty percent are Negroes. Negroes get three and one-half years less school than whites. The Negro adult life span is seven years shorter than the white. Negro infant mortality is actually increasing. 69

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67 Warren, p. 25.
Yet, Warren again goes back to his old stand that he took in "The Briar Patch" and in Segregation. He concludes in 1965, as he did in 1956 and in 1930, that solution of the Negro problem will be a slow process of education and of gradualism. The Negro is not as interested in desegregation, Warren maintains, as the Negro is in being treated as any other citizen of the United States.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the various images of the Negro which Warren reveals in his writings and to analyze Warren's own attitude toward the Negro as expressed in those writings. Upon examining all of Warren's writings having to do with the Negro, one is left with three main pictures: first, the Negro as seen by the Southern white, second, the Negro as seen by the Northern white, and third, the Negro as seen by Warren himself. These pictures all contribute to reveal Warren's own attitude toward the Negro.

Warren leads one to believe that the Negro is basically better understood and accepted by the white Southerner. The Northerner is more interested in exploiting the Negro than in accepting him as an equal citizen. The Negro is better adjusted to life in the South, and although he does not always receive justice, he is often able to rise above the inequalities.

In his picture of the Southern white and his picture of the Northern white, as well as his view of the Negro, Warren seems to reveal a steadfast loyalty to a traditional Southern viewpoint. He has tried to acquire some more liberal positions in his attitude toward the Negro and his acceptance of the racial problem as an American problem, but he really has been unable to release the hold of his Southern point of view.
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