

Powell Be Praised!

Adam Powell puts his "new Negro" down on paper in "Marching Blacks". In his opening chapter "Once Upon a Time" he traces the Negro's history back to the coming of the first to these shores. Mr. Powell, unlike most historians, attributes the fact that slavery lasted so long to the slave caste system.

"If it had not been for the betrayal and espionage on the part of house Negro slaves the Civil War might never have been fought".

Mr. Powell goes on to develop his unique theory on the divisions between the house Negro and the field Negro. He states that "The alliance of the light-

skinned Negro with the house Negro was one of the most disastrous forces retarding the progress of the race." Further he states: "During all the years of Negro development no great Negro leader has arisen from the ranks of the house Negro caste."

Following his favorite thesis further Mr. Powell proclaims in no uncertain terms that "My folks were field Negroes for countless generations. That's why I belong to the masses. I am proud to consider myself a new Negro—a marching black." Further along in a chapter on "The People's Man" who is, of course, Adam Powell, Jr. himself, he takes much credit for unifying Negroes of all classes.

Mr. Powell introduces this chapter with the following lines:

"The time was ripe for someone, a new and dynamic leader. The masses were distrustful but hungry for leadership." He points out what he calls the disunity of Negroes — how upper-class light-skinned Negroes (except himself) frowned upon his darker friends. His friends chided him, too, for associating with "so many poor, black, underprivileged, emotional folks." This self-styled champion of the masses, himself the only upper-class mulatto who has escaped the virus of snobbery and hatred of the "blacks" was the unifying influence in the troubled years before World War II.

Of his church, the Abyssinian Baptist, the author modestly says: "I believe that Harlem is what it is mainly because of the efforts of that institution . . . It is a church that has pushed its four walls out and out until only the illimitable horizons circumscribe its sphere. It is the church that dares the impossible and succeeds. All over America, ever more frequently the smaller churches, black and white, are beginning to move as the Abyssinian Church has moved."

The latter section of his book after he has brought Negroes together is more acceptable in its recounting of events of importance to Negroes during the war years. Throughout, however, Mr. Powell is as guilty of divisive talk as any in his frequent discussions of class and color differences. Some of his statements in this respect are certainly open to question. "Mulattos became atheists overnight," for instance.

Mr. Powell's style will be familiar to readers of "The People's Voice" who are accustomed now to his repeated use of marching blacks, new Negro, new whites, people's war, God's angry man (John Brown), marching up freedom road, etc., etc. It varies from the flowery declamative pages which remind one of a sermon to the more familiar, man-on-the-street approach, Ex.: "The new Negro sure was something".

Other Powellisms:

"The Great Depression was coming to a close, but the grapes of wrath had been restored . . ."

"Leave the fascist portions of the South, freedom lovers, while the world is in the process of change!"

"This is what I am a product of — the sustained indignation of a branded grandfather, the militant protest of my grandmother, the disciplined resentment of my father and mother, and the power of mass action of the church."

"My father was a radical and a prophet — I am a radical and a fighter."

Seldom has any other man in public life written such a testimonial to his work. It is unfortunate that he chose to do so in an account of the Negro rise threaded through with exaggerations and misstatements.

"MARCHING BLACKS" by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.; The Dial Press; New York City; 1945; \$2.50.