

Book Reviews Current and Choice

BLACK WOMEN WRITERS (1950-1980) Edited by Marie Evans

BLOODS By Wallace Terry

By Jadi Omowale

Two very special books are reviewed month; BLACK WOMEN WRITERS, Edited by Marie Evans and BLOODS by Wallace Terry.

Terry is a journalist and former Time magazine correspondent who covered Vietnam for two years during the late sixties.

Bloods is the first book written about the experiences of blacks in Vietnam; the book is doubly special because Terry stands back and lets us hear about the war from the mouths of twenty black veterans.

Some of these men were enlisted, some draftees, some careerists; all of their stories are uniquely their own.

As a compilor and editor Terry has had the good sense not to interject here; he allows each man to tell it his way.

The reader quickly realizes that the Vietnam experience was a particular and different one to each of these former black soldiers.

Yet it was another war depicted as necessary to protect the myth of American democracy. African-American men had fought in every war, including World War's I and I and in Korea. Yet after fighting against the elusive enemy in each war, he more often than not returned home to a country that despised him and his loved ones and in which he was barred from sharing in this great democracy.

In **BLOODS** each man describes how he came to serve in Vietnam:

Specialist 4 Robert E. Holcomb

"They took me inside to say the oath, and I refused. So they took me outside.

The other agent said, "Listen, Bob, if you don't say the oath, we're gonna lock you up forever. You just won't be seen around anymore.

So I said, All right." And we went back in-. I raised my hand and said the oath. I was sworn into the Army in manacles."

Colonel Fred V. Cherry

"I had no problems with the orders to go to Vietnam. It was just like the people in South Vietnam wanna be free to make their own decisions, to have a democratic government. An the commies were trying to take over. And being a serviceman, when the commander in chief says time to go, we head out."

HM2 Luther C. Benton III

"Being the only son in my family, I did not have to accept the orders to Vietnam. I accepted the orders because I wanted to see what the war was all about. And I thought that if we were there, then it must be right. We have to stop communism before it gets to America. I was just like all the other

The testimonies in BLOODS gives the reader a rare inside look at not only what happened in Vietnam, but the dynamics of fighting for a country which still daily oppresses people of African decent.

An often brutal and painful account to read but necessary for those looking for the painful truth that history supplies. Terry should be rewarded for allowing these men to express themselves about a war that changed their lives forever.

In her book, NAPPY EDGES, Ntozake Shange says we should know our poets like we know our musicians.

For instance, is this Sonia Sanchez or Audre Lorde:

see you weaving pain into garlands the shape of a noose while I grow of licking my heart for moisture cactus tongued

Lorde of course, but Shange's point is well taken. We should hear the voice, in the poem, the prose, know the style of the poet or writer.

This new compilation by Mari Evans, of fifteen African-American women writers is concerned with just that, the voice, style and philosophies of these particular writers.

Some of the writers in BLACK WOMEN WRITERS (1950-1980), include: Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Childress, Lucille Clifton, Gayl Jones and Paule Marshall.

Because, "Historically, very little serious critical attention has been directed toward the creative energy and expertise of that large body of black women who have provided the matrix for much of what is classic, what is significant, what is nurturing in the field of African-American letters," says, poet and fiction writer Evans.

Clearly, the proverbial labor of love, Evans has compiled the first critical examination of African-American women writers. Five hundred plus pages thick, she brings together for each writer; save Paule Marshall and Margaret Walker, an essay on her craft by the writer, and two critical essays by various distinguished black critics on each writer biographical information and a bibliography on each writer.

And it is often the essay by the writer herself that is the most revealing, thought provoking and helpful portions of the book. Which is why such personal statements by Marshall and Walker are sorely missed.

The critical essays by the writers such as: Haki Madhubuti; Eugenia Collier; Eleanor Traylor and David Williams; to name but a few, are insightful as for example the essay written by Paula Giddings on the work of Nikki Giovanni, entitled, "Nikki Giovanni, Taking A Chance On Feeling".

My only problem with the volumn is that it is not nearly complete. More such efforts need to be continually done on the many fine African-American writers both male and female who have never been included in a volumn of this sort.



