

Evelyn Gross Avery. *Rebels and Victims: The Fiction of Richard Wright and Bernard Malamud*. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1979) 116 pp. \$10.00

Rebels and Victims is a useful contribution to the comparative analysis of ethnic literature. This balanced, thorough presentation on the fiction of Wright and Malamud examines their ethnic literary works. Avery touches on many interdisciplinary factors which make the book of some interest to those discussing Afro-American and Jewish-American ethnic groups functioning in society.

Avery's work concerns the literary treatment of the "marginal man" in ethnic perspective. Fictional characters are examined for behavior patterns in response to socio-economic status outside the mainstream of American society. Avery sees the rebel and the victim as characters created in direct correlation to the ethnic backgrounds of Wright and Malamud.

While Avery is on target for those works of fiction knowledgeably discussed in detail, there are generalized implications throughout the book which encompass Afro-American and Jewish American fiction and life with the rebel/victim concept. Rebels and victims as presented by Wright and Malamud are not consistent characterizations in Afro-American and Jewish-American literature and the two do not fully represent the ethnic groups' experiences. Perhaps it is because we are sensitized to stereotyping that, from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, literary archetypes lack credibility and acceptability when applied to ethnic group experience. Fiction from an ethnic perspective draws upon the author's experience. It is the individual creative spirit which redefines actions in terms of personal perception.

Avery emphasizes the strength of Judaism and Malamud's firmly established ties with his religious and cultural heritage. History, culture, and religion of the Jewish group are closely intertwined in Malamud's concepts of life. Avery explains a bond in being Jewish which is ingrained in the historical identity.

Avery contends that Christianity, as a white religion, has not provided the spiritual foundation blacks require. She provides supporting documentation of Afro-American literature showing a

contrast between black Christianity as a negative force and the positive strength of Judaism in American ethnic literature. Avery states her belief that Afro-American literature often displays a lack of cultural identity due to the historical removal from the ancient cultures of Africa, and the damage of slavery and segregation.

Essentially the book does not recognize that despite all that has been done to blacks in America, Afro-Americans have maintained a strong and vital heritage. Afro-Americans survive as an ethnic group in American society through an inherent bond to life, group history, and rich tradition. Christianity is not synonymous with heritage for the Afro-American for black heritage and culture transcend specific religious boundaries. The influence of Christianity cannot be denied, but it should be examined in context as one of many angles in a multifaceted pattern of group experience.

In examining relationships between Afro-Americans and Jewish-Americans, Avery points to certain issues of our time as well as historical religious ideas which have divided the two ethnic groups.

Rebels and Victims is recommended for academic libraries. It will be useful, perhaps because of its failings as well as its assets, in provoking discussion of interdisciplinary ethnic studies.

Paula M. Henry

State University College of Arts and Science, New York

Salvatore J. LaGumina. *The Immigrants Speak, Italian Americans Tell Their Story*. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1979). 209 pp \$14.95.

Salvatore J. LaGumina has been a tireless researcher, writer, lecturer and teacher in ethnic studies in general and in the Italian American experience in particular. His books include *Vito Marcantonio: the Peoples' Politician*; *Italians in the United States: A Bibliography*; *An Album of the Italian American*; *WOP: A Documentary History of Anti-Discrimination in the United States*; and *The Ethnic Dimension in American Society*. It was inevitable that his interests would direct him to oral history.