What does it mean to be Black in America?
From race hatred among children to the enraged response to Steny's "Nat Turner," Beacon books probe and record. For a free brochure describing books for and about Black America, write to Box 52, Beacon Press Boston, Mass. 02108

Black History can be studied independently; but fully to understand it, we must see it as part of American history. Black people are neither entirely passive in the stream of that history, nor are they isolated from it or connected with it merely through resistance. Black history is deeply enmeshed with the history of the country; it is a country which aT& are neither entirely passive in the stream of that history, nor are they isolated from it or connected with it merely through resistance. Black history is deeply enmeshed with the history of the country; it is a country which black people (however much against their will) will have helped build and to whose resources they have an equal claim. Even their resistance movements have at various times contributed to the shaping of American character."

Kenneth E. Boulding: Tragic Nonsense
An Essay on Liberation
by Herbert Marcuse
(Beacon Press; $5.95, paperback; $1.95)

It is hard to review with justice a book with which one is completely unsympathetic. Furthermore, what this ninety-page essay requires is mercy rather than justice, and I am not sure that I can provide even that. Herbert Marcuse has a reputation of being a somewhat fallen idol of the New Left, who seem at this time to be moving towards a more hard-line Marxism and away from the more gentle, humane, revisionist, "unitarian" Marxism which Marcuse represents.

One could almost interpret this volume as a sad little monument to a loss of faith. At one time, I imagine, Marcuse was a real Marxist. The horrors of Stalinism, Maoism, and even what he calls the "gray on gray" of the Eastern European socialist countries, have battered his true faith into a queer shapeless mass, which represents little more than a vague aspiration toward a more utopian sensibility in man. It would be easy to make fun of Marcuse's "liberation," for it seems to be liberation from soap, from fathers, from work, from the beastly world of productivity and exchange; and indeed it is hard to avoid visualizing Marcusian man as the remittance man of the cartoons, lounging away his life in idle fantasies on a Tahitian beach.

Even if Marcuse's utopia were more attractive than others, he seems to have no way of getting there. Revolution is hopeless, the working class is entirely corrupted by middle class standards and all he seems to have to fall back on is student revolt, the hippies and something called biological solidarity, with "bodies unsoiled by plastic cleanliness." One fears that the biological solidarity lies mainly in the sense of smell.

The depressing thing about nonsense is that it remains nonsense no matter how well dressed in utopian fantasies and German philosophical circumlocutions. I am afraid my verdict on this essay is that it is nonsense, not even attractive nonsense like the "Yellow Submarine." The "great refusal" which
Marcuse talks about in the rebelling young is, one fears, almost identical with the great refusal of Peter Pan. The class war of youth against age, which is perhaps the only class war that is real, must remain eternally inconclusive, for if youth ever wins, it will by that time be old and will regret its victory. Perhaps Marcuse's nonsense is distressing because it is tragic, and nonsense should always be comic. It is the tragedy of a man betrayed by his own sensitivity and humanity into a failure to see the complexity of the social path by which these virtues are actually achieved, and advocating the shortcuts that lead to disaster.

Stanley Moss:
Joy out of Terror

Shall We Gather at the River
by James Wright

(Wesleyan University Press; $4.00, paper $2.00)

James Wright has written a book of great passion. In an age when the President's English (the language of evasion) and business English (the language of selling) are becoming standard in our public and private discussion, poetry has become the hot line on which our generation says what is necessary to its survival. Wright gives speech to dumb, horrible human suffering. In an essay on Neruda published a few months ago, Wright wrote, "I want poetry to make me happy, but the poetry I want should deal with the hell of our lives or else it leaves me cold." This is a book rooted in the dumping grounds of American life: barren steel towns, the slums of Minneapolis, the drunk tank, the home for senior citizens, the graves of the forgotten dead. Even Wright's birds are cast down by nature.

How can such a book make us happy? Wright makes poetry of materials the world leaves for dead, defiles or throws out. We can find joy in these poems, experiencing what used to be purges' out the terror, just as in the painting of Bosch; we do not pity a painting of Bosch; we do not pity a painting of Bosch.

Lord, I have loved thy cursed.

I die with them.