

DARK SYMPHONY

**NEGRO LITERATURE
IN AMERICA**

*edited by James A. Emanuel
and Theodore L. Gross*

THE FREE PRESS, NEW YORK



COLLIER-MACMILLAN LIMITED, LONDON

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*For Our Children,
James, Jr.,
Donna, and Jonathan*

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Printed in the United States of America

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"Black jam for dr. negro," by Mari Evans, Copyright © 1968 by Mari Evans. Printed here for the first time.

Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Ontario
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 68-54984

First Printing



424550

PREFACE

The literature of American Negroes has not yet been discovered by a wide audience. We have scarcely named the artists who are worthy of our attention, not to speak of estimating their individual achievements; we have insisted upon the central significance of racial issues in American culture, but we have not yet seriously consulted the Negro writers themselves. A vast and varied literature awaits our consideration, one that we need to possess imaginatively if we are to know ourselves more fully as Americans.

Until recently Americans have viewed the Negro through the eyes of white authors. This perspective has an interest of its own, but whenever we read about the Negro as conceived by our traditional writers, we sense that his dialect, his laughter, his sorrow, his life style—so often close to caricature, so often touching upon fantasy—obscure his complexity, diversity, and essential humanity. This book is a record of that humanity, as expressed by our most eloquent Negro writers.

The criterion for inclusion in this volume is the intrinsic artistic merit of the story, the poem, or the essay. Most previous collections of American Negro literature have necessarily brought together works of historical and social as well as of literary importance; scholars have occupied themselves with the pri-

mary task of gathering the written materials of Negro culture without making those aesthetic distinctions that help to create a literary tradition. But we have reached the moment in our history when it becomes possible, and indeed necessary, to designate which works by Negroes deserve to be part of the heritage of American literature.

If, as Richard Wright observed more than a generation ago, the Negro is America's metaphor, it is particularly significant to understand the meaning of that metaphor: to know it organically, from within the mind and spirit of the American Negro himself. And if one of our primary aims as readers of native works of art is to discover the complex fate of being American, to banish stereotypes of thought and character and discover the truth about our own people, then it is time we viewed the Negro through his own clear eyes, listened to the Negro in his own best voice, and felt the complexity of the Negro's humanity in the most intimate and permanent form that has been available to him—literary expression.

JAMES A. EMANUEL
THEODORE L. GROSS

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