

Soul On Ice

Book review

Oscar Garcia

1968

a review of

Soul On Ice by Eldridge Cleaver. 210 pages. Ramparts (McGraw-Hill).

The Texas Outlaw's Kerner Commission told the nation that the black and white races are moving rapidly in different directions. Eldridge Cleaver tells it better in his new book.

When one sits down to think about it, he realizes that real communication and understanding between black and white Americans is virtually nil. As Herb Boyd, of the Wayne State Association of Black Students put it, "White students really assimilate what they learn here, but after we dig Freud, we go home and read Le Roi Jones."

Cleaver's book can be considered a breakthrough in racial communication. The remarkable clarity of expression of near mystical experience would set any writer apart as brilliant. The fact that Cleaver was born in Little Rock, Ark., raised in the Los Angeles Ghetto, and self-educated at three California state prisons makes his book a triumph.

On soul food, Malcolm X, crime and punishment, or interracial sex, Cleaver is honest with his reader. That is possible because Cleaver is honest with himself:

"After I returned to prison, I took a long look at myself and, for the first time in my life, admitted that I was wrong, that I had gone astray—astray not so much from the white man's law as from being human, civilized—for I could not approve the act of rape. Even though I had some insight into my own motivations, I did not feel justified. I lost my self respect. My pride as a man dissolved and my whole fragile moral structure seemed to collapse, completely shattered.

"That is why I started to write. To save myself."

Traditionally, among men, the woman closest to their heart is held inviolate: the Spanish call it honor, the Church calls it purity, and some Americans think of it as Mother to the jeers of other Americans.

So the aspirations that men symbolize in their ideal women are sacred in particular and not to be toyed with in general. Thus the nearly insane rage of the white racist at interracial sex, even the slightest suggestion.

Cleaver started his book on a mystic note of love/hate toward the white woman:

I love you

Because you're white,

Not because you're charming

Or bright.

Your whiteness
Is a silky thread
Snaking through my thoughts
In redhot patterns
Of lust and desire.
I hate you
Because you're white.
Your white meat
Is nightmare food.
White is
The skin of Evil.
You're my Moby Dick,
White Witch,
Symbol of the rope and hanging tree,
Of the burning cross.
Loving you thus
And hating you so,
My heart is torn in two. Crucified.

At the end of the book, in the last chapter, Cleaver reconciles himself with the black woman:

"Across the naked abyss of negated masculinity, of four hundred years minus my balls, we face each other today, my Queen. I feel a deep, terrifying hurt, the pain of humiliation of the vanquished warrior...I can't bear to look into your eyes...in impotent silence I listened...to your screams for help, anguished pleas of terror...the sound of my woman's pain...THE SOUND OF DEATH, ME; I HEARD, I HEAR IT EVERY DAY, I HEAR HER NOW...I HEAR YOU NOW...I HEAR YOU...But put on your crown, my Queen, and we will build a new city on these ruins."

Throughout the four sections is a running psychic tone of a terrifying subjugation to power by most Americans having to "worship at the shrine of General Motors" made unbearable for black men turned eunuchs with their perpetual "nuts in the sand".

Make no mistake: Cleaver's book is excellent for an unprecedented expression of where we've all been before. But it is both galling and terrifying for both sides in the whispered tones of Cleaver's calm style.

Cleaver has made one thing clear: racism is in every white American and influenced or hurt every black American, even we/you sweet youthfolk who ball freely by night.

That is why we are not going to grow out of it in this generation or even in this century. And that is why we ought to get this book in the schools—fast.

fifth Estate

Oscar Garcia
Soul On Ice
Book review
1968

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/58-july-18-31-1968/soul-on-ice>
Fifth Estate #58, July 18-31, 1968

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)