

S. Husin Ali. *The Malays: Their Problems and Future*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1982) viii, 143 pp., \$7.00 paper.

On December 3, 1974, 2000 Malaysian university students staged demonstrations on the playing field of the Selangor Club in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. They were demonstrating their sympathy for the peasant rubber growers of Kedah, who had been brought to a state of desperate poverty by inflation and the low price of rubber, and protesting government policies which were ostensibly designed to improve the economic condition of all Malays, but had apparently succeeded only in enriching a small group of Malay politicians and businessmen. They demanded a fundamental reorganization of the political and economic system to ensure that the enormous profits being made in the country—mainly by tin mining, rubber and palm oil cultivation, and related industries—should flow to the common people rather than to the wealthy elite and powerful foreign-owned companies.

The government cracked down hard on the demonstrators. 1,100 students were arrested on the day of the demonstrations, and on December 7 the Special Branch arrested three university lecturers who were accused of encouraging and leading the student rebellion. One of those arrested was the author of this book, an associate professor of anthropology and sociology at the University of Malaya. He was held without trial for six years under the Internal Security Act. Although he steadfastly refused to withdraw his criticisms of the government or to “confess” to his alleged communist connections, he was finally released and allowed to return to his teaching post in 1980. This book was written while he was in detention.

Professor S. Husin Ali is one of the most accomplished social scientists in Malaysia, having written numerous scholarly books and articles and taught hundreds of university students since the early 1960s. He is also a formidable critic of what he sees as the injustices in contemporary Malaysian society. This book is a clear and concise statement of his political philosophy and his view of the Malaysian social order. He argues that the ills of the existing system stem mainly from the *laissez faire* capitalist economy inherited from the colonial period and now perpetuated by the upper class Malays, Chinese, and Indians who benefit from it. He explores in detail the historical and structural roots of the poverty of rural Malays and shows why the current economic boom has done little if anything to improve their standard of living. He criticizes the “racial politics” of the country, which pit the Malays, Chinese, and Indians against each other, as obscuring the true cause of poverty, which is the exploitation of the lower class of all ethnic groups by a small privileged class. As a remedy he proposes a form of

democratic socialism. This would involve the nationalization of all foreign-owned industries, the organization of many industries as cooperatives, and comprehensive land reform. The case is well-argued, with pertinent evidence drawn from published sources and his own field research. The tone is earnest but reasonable, a far-cry from the tone of the criticism leveled against his and similar views. Whatever the merits of the author's criticisms and proposals, his ideas deserve to be heard and discussed, not distorted and suppressed.

—Kirk Endicott  
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Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, eds. *Confirmation: An Anthology of AfricanAmerican Women*. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1983) 418 pp., \$17.95, \$10.95 paper.

In his introduction to *Confirmation*, Amiri Baraka points out that the anthology is not "intended, in the same way that *Black Fire* was, to attack the house-negro appropriation of bourgeois aesthetics. Rather the purpose of this volume is to draw attention to the existence and excellence of black women writers." The volume accomplishes that extraordinarily well. *Confirmation* is a major contribution, for it provides solid illustration of the range of work being produced by an impressive number (an even fifty) of accomplished black women writers.

The problem of doing justice to an anthology such as this in a brief critical review is evident. The wealth of material is simply too great. The collection gathers works by well-known authors such as Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton, Mari Evans, June Jordan, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Carolyn M. Rodgers, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker and, refreshingly, several of these women are represented by recent and hitherto unpublished works. An added value is the inclusion of material from a host of lesser known writers, some of whom are making their debut in print here.

Although poetry dominates the book, there is a good sampling of prose: short stories, personal narratives, drama, two critical essays. Inasmuch as the overall quality of the volume is so high, one hesitates