

# New Directions

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## Bookfile

Editorial Staff

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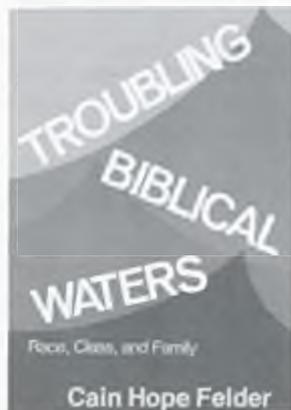
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## THE ARTS

## BOOKFILE

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*Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family*, by Cain Hope Felder, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 233 pages.

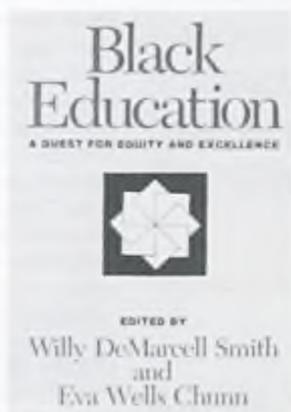
This landmark study on the significance of the Bible for Blacks and the importance of Blacks in the Bible is the result of eight years of research by Felder, who is professor of New Testament language and literature at Howard's School of Divinity and editor of the *Journal of Religious Thought*, which the school publishes.

He wrote the book "to provide some sorely needed correctives regarding the Bible in relation to ancient Africa and Black people today," he says in the introduction. "Despite the fact that the Bible has a favorable attitude about Blacks, post-biblical misconstruals of biblical traditions have created the impression that the Bible is primarily the foundational document of the 'the White Man's religion.' The mistaken notion widely persists that the relation of Black people to the Bible is a post-biblical experience. Such historical distortions, created by Euro-

centric scholars and missionaries to the detriment of Blacks, have long been one of my concerns."

The book's title is derived from the words of the spiritual "Wade in the Water" ("God's a gonna trouble the water.") As Felder writes:

"I firmly believe that Black people need to *trouble the waters* with perspectives and information not usually addressed by discrete theological curricula." □



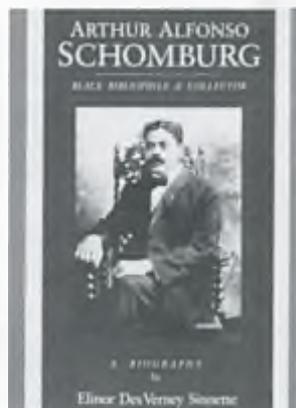
*Black Education: A Quest for Equity and Excellence*, edited by Willy DeMarcell Smith and Eva Wells Chunn, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J., and Oxford, England, 246 pages.

This collection of papers, commissioned by the National Urban League, examines educational issues that profoundly affect the lives of Black Americans during a period of transition. The book cites as markers of this transition: the shifting responsibility for education from the federal to the local level; the deterioration of many educational institutions that once served minorities well; and the erosion of many progressive social programs and policies that originally had offered so much promise.

"Pivotal to these times and changes is the question of the extent the American educational system — its policies, its plans, and its practices — has been and is capable of being responsive to, incorporating, and even

instigating equity and excellence for black Americans," write editors Smith and Chunn in the book's preamble. Smith is director of research and special assistant to the dean at Howard's School of Business. Chunn is a senior research associate for the District of Columbia public school system.

Among the book's other contributors are numerous educators with Howard connections. They include former Howard University President James E. Cheek; Howard University Board of Trustees Chairman John E. Jacob, president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League; and faculty members Sylvia T. Johnson, Faustine C. Jones-Wilson, Joyce A. Ladner, Alvin Thornton and Mary Carter-Williams. □



*Arthur Alfonso SCHOMBURG: Black Bibliophile & Collector*, by Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, The New York Public Library/Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 262 pages.

This is a pioneering biography of a pioneering Black bibliophile whose lifelong commitment to preserving materials concerning the history and culture of people of African descent formed the core of the world-renowned New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Sinnette, chief librarian at Howard's own world-renowned Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, has drawn

on a wide range of sources — including personal papers owned by Schomburg's descendants — to paint a portrait of a driven, complex man who labored against enormous odds to build his collection. And she places this achievement within a historical framework. As she writes in the book's prologue:

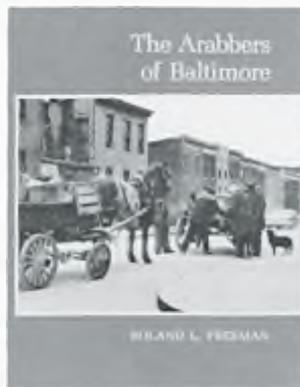
"In the early years of this century, a group of black American scholars, professionals, and lay persons pledged themselves to collect and document materials reflecting their historical and racial consciousness. The collected evidence, their research and published works, informed a skeptical audience about the accomplishments and contributions of blacks to the growth and development of society. This body of information served to refute so-called scientific theories of the black race's inferiority, while their activities encouraged and inspired racial pride within the black community. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg was foremost among this group."

Born in Puerto Rico to a Black mother and a white father, Schomburg emigrated to the United States in 1891. His arrival in New York City, writes Sinnette in the book's epilogue, was "fortuitous," for it "placed Schomburg at one of the major crossroads of the world and in the heart of the nation's largest black metropolis."

She adds: "This enabled him to meet a variety of individuals and to be exposed to a wide range of opinion. He was ripe for the 'New Negro' movement and vice-versa. Whereas Schomburg's fellow bibliophiles tended to focus their collecting mission narrowly on black American materials, he had a broader view . . .

"As a consequence of his background, personality, and vision, Schomburg's collection became more than a repository of information; it was a prism through which

blacks could examine themselves and define their position in the panorama of world history." □



*The Arabbers of Baltimore*, by Roland L. Freeman, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, Md., 176 pages.

This is a visual and narrative journey into the world of Baltimore's horsecart vendors, who have been referred to as "arabbers" for most of this century. Most of them are and have been Black.

Freeman, a former photographer-in-residence/research associate with Howard's now-defunct Institute for the Arts and Humanities, grew up in the arabber tradition and has brought an insider's perspective to his subject. His book is the result of a photodocumentary project that spanned 20 years.

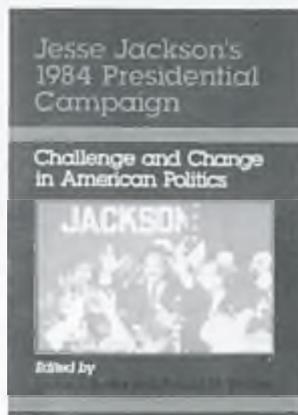
His lens and text capture the lives of the hardworking folk who travel Baltimore's inner-city neighborhoods with their handsome displays of fruits and vegetables, punctuating the air with their distinctive songs and hollers. He shows the arabbers at work, at rest, in moods jovial, proudful, bantering, reflective and sorrowful.

His book is also a lament for a tradition that is fast disappearing. Today only five arabbing stables still operate in Baltimore, he reports.

In a chapter entitled "My Roots in Arabbing," he writes:

"The photographs in this book are my own attempt to

pay tribute to these nomadic hucksters, freewheeling and independent, resourceful and industrious merchants of lore. With their captivating hollers and plumed ponies pulling brightly colored wagons, they have cast a romantic light on Charm City. There is also an admirable kind of individualism about the Baltimore arabbers. Despite early efforts to prevent blacks from being licensed in this trade they still provide a type of commerce long forgotten in most American cities. For over two hundred years, these men and women have earned a living out of the sometimes hostile urban environment, using the few tools that a dominant white culture allowed them." □



*Jesse Jackson's 1984 Presidential Campaign: Challenge and Change in American Politics*, edited by Lucius J. Barker and Ronald W. Walters, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 257 pages.

In this collection of essays, social scientists bring a variety of ethnic, political and academic perspectives to an analysis and assessment of the Rev. Jesse Jackson's first campaign for the presidency. Their aim is not so much to celebrate the historic candidacy as to take a long, hard look at its meaning, intent, strengths, weaknesses and impact.

The book is edited by Lucius J. Barker, a public affairs and political science professor at Washington Uni-

versity, and Ronald W. Walters, a political science professor at Howard who served as Jackson's deputy campaign manager for issues during the 1984 campaign.

Three other current members of Howard's political science department are among the book's other contributors: Joseph P. McCormick II, Alvin Thornton and Lorenzo Morris.

The book's concluding essay by Morris and Linda F. Williams, associate director of research at the Joint Center for Political Studies in Washington, D.C., is typical of the volume's tone. They write:

"What made the Jackson campaign new and distinct to American voters was not simply or even primarily his racial identity nor the fact that he had never held political office, but most especially that he sought to mobilize the support of the historically dispossessed, a 'rainbow coalition' of blacks, hispanics, women, young people, lower-income whites, and activists from various liberal causes. Historically, most of these groups have voted at far lower rates than affluent and middle-income whites. Typically they have been referred to as marginal voters — groups far more difficult to mobilize in large numbers."

Yet Jackson's efforts to build such a coalition fell short, the authors also point out. In their words, "The Rainbow Coalition did not come to full bloom in the presidential election of 1984. The coalition's potential for development was weakened by external and internal factors. While some members of each ethnic and racial group voted for Jackson, a broadly representative number of coalition voters failed to materialize. Jackson was left without sufficient strength to make the coalition a strong bargaining bloc at the Democratic convention and a significant force in the general election."



*Black is the Color of the Cosmos*, by Charles T. Davis, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 376 pages.

This is a collection of essays by the late scholar-teacher who was the highly regarded chairman of Yale's Afro-American studies program. It traces major currents in the development of African American literature and culture from 1942 to 1981.

During this period, as literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., writes in the book's preface: "Charles Davis . . . concerned himself with how a black text *means*, both in its immediate cultural and literary context and in ours."

Among the specific writers whose works are examined in the book are Paul Laurence Dunbar, Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Other topics include the slave narrative, the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement.

About Davis' theory of Black literature, Gates observes: "What is most curious about it, in one striking sense, is the sustained meditation on the trope of blackness which provides its foundation." □

*This column on recent releases appears from time to time. Ed.*