

'More than a look, into a Mau Mau mind'

THE FOLLOWING is a review in *Time Magazine* of April 14, of Victor Stafford Reid's book *The Leopard*:

The Leopard (159 pp)—Victor Stafford Reid — Viking (\$3)

"At the present literary rate of exchange, one African satari equals roughly one novel about Mau Mau trouble.

"Most such books shine only a feeble light into an area where burning racial hatred has obscured the underlying questions of right and wrong — or else they glare with a Ruark-like, eye-witness sensationalism.

"It may be a virtue of *The Leopard* that its author, Victor Reid, has never been in Africa.

"Novelist Reid is a Jamaican journalist; his only other novel, *New Day*, reflected the colour and sensuousness of his native Caribbean island. What he has tried for in *The Leopard* is more than a look into a Mau Mau mind. It is no less than an effort to glimpse the African soul suffering between felt injustice and the dim knowledge that the white man's impact has ended once and for all the chance of returning to the Eden of primitive ignorance and tribal pride that existed before he came.

"Author Reid's hero is Nebu, a simple Kikuyu who was once a houseboy for an English planter. Now he is a Mau Mau whose deepest joy comes when a white is made "beautiful", i.e. seen in the final torments of death. The plot is so firmly tied to coincidence as to make it seem slightly ridiculous. After a raid, Nebu drops off from his Mau Mau gang to follow white tracks through the bush. When he catches up to the white man, he finds his old boss, and after he has killed him, he discovers the white man's son, a crippled boy of ten. The boy is neither white nor black. He is, in fact, Nebu's son by the white man's wife, who had seduced her houseboy years before and was herself killed by her husband when he saw the child's colour.

"Wounded, Nebu tries to get to a white town to deliver the boy to his friends. In his uncomplicated Kikuyu mind, he knows that he has wronged his white master and wants to atone by returning

the youngster. As he carries him through the bush, trailed by a leopard waiting for a chance to make a double kill, Nebu is tormented by his son's presence even more than by his festering



wounded the leopard, an implacable figure of retribution, provides a horrible ending that blends all the tragic elements of white, black and half-black frustrations and hatred.

"What author Reid has done is to give his story the quality of near myth to make the horror understandable. No recent novel about the Mau Mau has succeeded as does *The Leopard* in making clear how the black man rationalises his murderous bent. What is even more remarkable is author Reid's ability to create a feeling for the land itself, to blend a lyrical, near-poetic portrait of a primitive mind with his brutal subject matter. Unashamedly contrived, his book is quite simply a brief imaginative triumph.

— TIME