

2495 Redding Road, Fairfield, Connecticut, September 15, 1964

Dear Jason:

Some weeks ago -- five or six -- I sent to Powell the pages I enclose here, from Chapter III of Who Speaks For The Negro, and asked him if he would let me have permission. I have had no answer, and the time is growing near to get all permissions settled. I wonder if I can appeal to you for your influence.

By the way, I sent him a carbon of the letter to you which said that I had read the MS for you and heartily endorsed its publication -- or something like that.

In case you are willing to take over for me -- and in case he has lost the previous copy I sent him -- you could use this.

By the way, I can't see anything here he could object to, do you? Unless, of course, he has changed his mind about who his grandfather is.

See you soon!

Thanks,

PS I finally finished the review of Salberman. It is a fine book.

(Chapter III -- page 1, WHO SPEAKS FOR THE NEGRO)

The father of Adam Clayton Powell was the son of a Virginia slaveholder, a certain Powell killed in one of the late battles of the Civil War, and of a Cherokee squaw named Sally. The mother of Adam Clayton Powell was the daughter of Colonel Jacob Shaefer, of the brewing family, and of his life-long mistress, The ~~widow~~ father of Adam Clayton Powell, a man of great force, managed to get an education, and became minister of the famous Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York; and the son grew up in extremely comfortable circumstances, surrounded by adoring females, his mother, his older sister, and his nurse. As a youth, he was, by his own account, handsome, self-indulgent, and dissipated. He could easily pass for white, and therefore, when working as a summer bell boy at the fashionable Equinox House, in Manchester, Vermont, had the daily privilege of opening the door of the limousine of Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln: Robert Todd Lincoln could not tolerate Negroes and if a Negro laid his hand on the car to open a door would lift his stick and crack him across the knuckles. At Colgate University, which the young Powell attended after a period at City College in New York, he was taken to be white until his father preached at the University and spoke ardently in behalf of the rights of Negroes. His roommate left him a note saying he couldn't share quarters any longer with him. This, says Adam Clayton Powell, "came as a tremendous shock to me. Patterson and I had been such good friends ... buddies. Slept with the same women. Drank out of the same bottle. And just because my father, logically and factually, presented the cause of the Negro people, he refused to have me stay in our room any longer... and the Dean put me out."

There was to be another shock, he says. In the fall of 1930 he returned from a trip to Europe -- a graduation present -- to find the Depression in full swing. But young Powell, well insulated by his father's success, had no real sense of community with the suffering around him until five Negro physicians who had been banned from the Harlem Hospital because of race, asked him to become "their flaming tongue." The national Negro organizations, he says, would not support the protests of the physicians, and so he organized his first mass meeting, led his first picketing. In the spring he led, to City Hall, 6000 demonstrators who, he says, "moved as one with me, for in ~~a~~ ^{the} few short months we had lived together I had taught them the power of nonviolence."

His career had begun. "The people of the streets, the failures, the misfits, the despised, the maimed, the beaten, the sightless and the voiceless had made a captive of me...I was to know no other love but these people. Whenever they commanded, I followed, but followed to lead." *

*All information and quotations in this section are drawn from an as yet unpublished autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, with the author's permission.

(FOLLOWED BY TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW)

PERMISSION GRANTED:

Adam Clayton Powell

Date:

Permissum

AIR

Robert Penn Warren,
2495 Redding Road,
Fairfield,
Connecticut

