

ROBERT PENN WARREN BOX 10 JACKSON COLLEGE STUDENTS TAPE #1

Mr. WARREN: This is the beginning of the interview with students at Jackson College, Jackson, Mississippi. When you speak, give your name. It might be useful, you see. When you have something to say, you say "my name is so-and-so" - just say your name, and we can keep a record. Let's begin with a general question - a general topic. What would you expect from Negro leadership - any impression of that? (pause) No taker? I don't want to act like a class and point fingers, you know - speak up.

CYRUS CRESSWELL: My name is Cyrus Cresswell. To me, a leader should be one who thinks of all humanity in such a way that he'd rather think that - that is approved by everyone. Therefore, I might be generalizing to some extent - I think in Mississippi that the Negro leaders are not up to par as they should be. I think -

Mr. WARREN: Would you want to be more specific about where they've failed here in your opinion?

CRESSWELL: In my opinion, in the boycotting of different - various supermarkets, I feel - my personal belief is that I feel that Reverend A.L.T. Smith is using his store as a place to gain profit for himself, without trying to benefit humanity, as I said before.

Mr. WARREN: How about you?

ALEC SANDERS: My name is Alec Sanders. In respect to the question about Negro leadership, I think we need more leadership and smaller communities, especially in the state of Mississippi, in

the areas of teaching and in religious leadership. I feel that we fail in the areas - small areas in the immediate community, where incidental education goes along with formal. Many cases we find ourselves fall short after coming to college and seeing a broader perspective of life, as compared to our provincial areas. And to work in this area is the place where we would really begin to solve the problem. To begin with - well, we - if you will permit me to use a trite expression - the leaders of tomorrow will have - are being made. If we could get better religious leaders, teachers, principals, administrators and businessmen - and smaller areas.

Mr. WARREN: If anyone wants it, there it is.

DELLA BURT: My name is Della Burt. First of all I would like to say that I expect a Negro leader to guard the mass with their best interest in mind, and also in the field of education. Because the Negro is struggling for their rights and so forth, I feel that we should have Negro leaders who will help us in this field so we will be qualified at that time.

Mr. WARREN: Well, Miss Burt, it is sometimes said that the mass as you call it, has been ahead of leadership. The leaders seem to have moved in and used the direction already manifested in the mass. The mass has not been passive in the recent years, waiting for leaders. They have provided the energy, and the leaders have stepped into a moment created by the mass unplanned for them - such as Montgomery. That is, no one planned Montgomery situation. Then leadership used it.

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Miss BURT: Yes, I think that that is true too. But in this case, as in the Montgomery case, the mass undoubtedly was very strong, as there were leaders in the mass. And at this time the leaders really came out. It was a - the mass supported the leaders, and in this way the leaders came out to help guide the mass into what they had intended to do.

Mr. WARREN: They emerged from a spontaneous action?

Miss BURT: Yes.

Mr. WARREN: They didn't plan the action - they emerged from the action - just as out of the troubles here, which was spontaneous, I gather. The leadership might have emerged in this direction or that direction - of course, in a mass action always leadership does emerge. This was spontaneous Who wants to talk?

JACQUELINE CHILD: I am Jacqueline Child, and I think that in your smaller cities in the South, where you need leadership, you find none. I mean, you find some, but it's not on the same basis that you find it in the larger cities, say, for instance, Jackson. You would find more leadership in Jackson than you would find in the smaller cities - my home town, for instance - Grenada, Mississippi. I think that our leaders need to make themselves known. I think that they are either afraid of losing their jobs or being outcasts or something. That we really need more leadership and - what in leadership I look for - people that I can look up to in cases of emergency, to confirm statements, to answer my questions

and in general to always - there is always someone you can go to and know that you will receive some response, either pro or con.

Mr. WARREN: Is this changing in the smaller places in Mississippi now? Is it changing?

Miss CHILD: Well, it's - within the last past five or six months I think that the Negro leadership is becoming more prevalent than it has been previously here.

Mr. WARREN: What about the educational program for registration - has that had any marked effect?

Miss CHILD: In your larger cities, yes, and in your smaller cities, I would say it's about the same.

Mr. WARREN: You see no signs of leadership beginning to emerge in the smaller places?

Miss CHILD: In my home town I've found that.

BOY: Well, I find that the leadership is coming in the small communities from the outside. Now, we have had for a long time, people in a given community say, who were willing to say house or feed leaders who would come from the outside, and they themselves, not having the educational level that is needed, the intellectual insights into the key problems, having had no real formal education in these things and no understanding of really what's going on - the workings of them - that they would foster a program in helping others to carry on the work that they should be prepared to do themselves, and in this way I think that a - say, Grenada, Itabina, Greenwood - the leadership is coming from the outside and trying to train leadership within.

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Mr. WARREN: Did that happen?

BOY: Yes.

Mr. WARREN: What is your home town?

BOY: Greenwood.

Mr. WARREN: (Indistinct - laughter) By the way, speaking of Greenwood, since I've been there - some years ago - people of Greenwood, what do you make - any of you - of the of the mistrial - how do you interpret it?

BOY: This is my interpretation -

RPW: Let's have it.

BOY: At first, there was a great bit of anxiety on my part, going through the trial - the daily trial - and I'd expected a clear verdict, not guilty. And to have this sort of opinion coming finally out of the trial, was a little encouraging to me. And perhaps at the next trial he will get a not guilty verdict, but this was -

RPW: Do you think this was rigged?

BOY: (laughter) Yes - I would like to think so. It's -

RPW: I mean, if it really was rigged merely for the purpose of seeming to the outside world -

BOY: (general comments) It went so smoothly - and to have the prosecuting attorney say that he had not received threatening phone calls - everything had gone smoothly - and -

GIRL: (indistinct)

GIRL: There's so much happening that you can't find logical reasoning for - really, you can just about say anything about it, because you really don't know.

RPW: No, we don't know.

GIRL: And you can form your own opinion about it because so much is undercover that was going on.

BOY: And I think that I was greatly embarrassed by the gross immorality of a key figure, coming up and shaking a man's hand who was on trial.

RPW: Yes - it is rather strange, isn't it.

BOY: Yes - that's immoral, to me.

RPW: Unusual in a court room, anyway.

All: Yes.

BOY: To have the high priest come in and -

GIRL: (Indistinct)

BOY: I think, too, on occasions before the trial, he has had opportunities to write or get letters, just through the outside -

through the news media here - many of the editorials and the

local papers have mentioned favorable comments for this man,

which gives rise to a suspicion in the execution~~m~~ of his case.

Of course, as many others here, I thought that it would be a flat not guilty verdict, and of course there were other possibilities, such as being decided mentally incompetent or temporary insanity.

All of these things can come into your mind, but never had I suspected a hung jury.

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RPW: Let's assume, just for the moment, that it was rigged, that it was planned and acted out as a little drama - what would that imply? That hasn't been the case in the past, has it?

BOY: Well, I would like to think of why (laughter).

RPW: Let's assume that it was rigged - then what is the meaning of that side?

BOY: It means that our system of justice will have to be revamped, especially on this level.

RPW: Well, why would they take the trouble to rig it? They have never tried to rig in the past - never bothered to rig it in the past.

BOY: You must remember that Mississippi is -

GIRL:

BOY: Very much so - much more than we have seen within the last few years, and to have this case, with the tension and the pressures ~~in~~ that are now coming to bear, and to not sort of appease a certain community, you see, would give rise to numerous demonstrations that they have not had before, and -

RPW: You mentioned of appeasement - what would the local community or part of the local community, the Mississippi community, or the outside world in this case?

BOY: Both.

RPW: Both. That is, there is a part of the Mississippi community to be appeased - is it just the Negro community or part of the white community too - that needs appeasement that way - any of you?

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BOY: Let's look at it this way - certain things that they would do, let us say, with the - a few weeks ago - last week, I believe, they sent one hundred thousand five hundred dollars - something like that - to Washington - to defeat this bill, and a few days ago the mayor was on TV asking for additional funds to build additional compounds to hold the prisoners that they are expecting during the summer months I'm sure. All of these things are pointing toward a rise in
Of course, to me, to send a hundred thousand dollars away when you need it at home, and you're asking the legislature to give you more money -

RPW: We need it at home to build more compounds with. (laughter)

(end of tape)

