

ROBERT PENN WARREN - GILBERT MOSES - AARON HENRY Box 4 2/10/64

Warren: Mr. Murphy. How do you spell your name? With an f or a ph?

Murphy: ph -

Warren: Y?

Murphy: Yes.

Warren: What's your first name?

Murphy: Dick.

Warren: Richard Murphy. Well, let's cut back to this question of your experience. What were you about to say?

Murphy: This has been very recent, as I was saying. Last week at the Jackson State riots, as we were -

Warren: Jackson State what - Jackson State riots? State College?

Murphy: At the State college - and we heard that the situation on the street had been growing since about five o'clock. Gilbert and I went out to try to report a story, and at this time - let me see - well, we were both - we were there for about fifteen minutes. Gilbert was taking pictures. I was asking questions.

Warren: You were talking with the students?

Murphy: Not actually with students^{nts.} This was after most of the students had gone home. It was the time, actually, in between the major demonstration and at the time when there was pretty much just the frustration on one street with people - oh, from the pool halls, from the cafes, - I said pool halls, but

there are some restaurants, who had been with nothing - without knowing anything more about the situation than we knew. And, we watched the emotions as they gradually were being built up. But about fifteen minutes after our arrival we were dispersed - I guess is the word - by six policemen carrying shot-guns and who used the butts of the shot guns quite freely in dispersing us.

Moses: Hitting you over the head and hitting me in the back, leaving scars.

Warren: Leaving scars on both of you?

Moses: Yes.

Warren: Is that the only episode?

Murphy: Yes, and - yes, other than the - other than being, well, I guess we both have been stopped once or twice and asked what we were doing in Jackson, and held up for - well, we had to give some kind of explanation. Even this experience becomes strange because I think we both should have realized that the crowds were disorganized - that the situation was out of hand and was likely to lead to just this kind of meaningless violence.

Warren: Suppose the police had left the crowd on the street, and not interfered. What then? Could you guess?

Murphy: No, I can't. On the other hand, I know that the police tactics that I saw were not designed so much to disperse, as to pick out from the crowd - well, anyone whom they thought represented

an organization, or - well, yes, an organization that had been working to bring some sort of change in Mississippi.

Warren: You mean knocking off the leaders - an excuse to knock off leaders? That was the idea, was that it?

Murphy: Well, when we were dispersed, put it this way - when we were dispersed, we were well behind the front lines of the crowd. In other words, the police came from the side and around us to where we were standing. So that it was not done to establish clear lines of demarcation between the place where a crowd could be or could not be.

Warren: We talk about the stereotyped Negro, created by the white man. What about the stereotype of white man, created by the Negro? Beg pardon?

Moses: You talk about it. You should know. Depends on whether you are talking about the Movement, or -

Warren: In general. I don't mean within the Movement. I mean in general. What stereotype of the White man is created by the Negro? We know, of course, that the stereotype of the Negro, created by the white man, contains many contradictions. And maybe that's true of the other, too.

Moses: Well, what's in the Movement - I know you find the whites characterized and these that are liberals, I think, mostly you find - well, I suppose there's bound to be a certain amount of - a certain amount of hysteria type.

Warren: Excuse me a second. I just want to make sure we're in business here. All right.

Moses: Like to get a position with Southern people - at least, by the Movement; I can only look at this through the eyes of the Movement at this point, of the Southern cop. The ignorance of the - and the big, Southern, old cow-boy like cop with his guns hanging down, and I mean, this is something - the fact that he is ignorant and stupid and he says, "I hates Negroes"- and that sort of thing. In a certain - that type of stereotype - and the contradiction should come when you realize that this guy can't - well, can't argue that he loves his children and the matter - he loves his children and there's some love in his life somewhere. He's capable of some tender emotions and he's capable of some rationality. As a matter of fact, and that itself, the fact that you realize that also comes the incomprehensibility of the fact that he actually does hate - hates Negroes. The stereotype of the Southern white, or no - the white who comes to work in the Movement is the see, generally, well, this is incrimination, actually, but the whites aren't very helpful in the initial part of the Movement. Because, one thing - they impair a great deal of the effectiveness -

Warren: How?

Moses: By being white and working in the community itself here. The Negroes mistrust them and this certainly attracts police

attention to you if you're working in a small community on voter registration. And, co-inciding with this is the awareness of a Negro, I suppose, that this is his fight, which means that it has to be mostly him. That he has to work on this alone. But, there's a stereotype of the white who works in the Movement, who sort of assimilates the Negro culture, so to speak - culture in quotation marks - who feels that he has to - I can't really speak about this - this is -

Warren: Please do.

Moses: He has to take over some of the Negro roots in order to feel some sort of identification and -

Warren: He tries to, you mean?

Moses: Yes. He says, he uses things that he identifies with the Negroes. He uses slang, and whatever dance craze the Negroes are avid about at the moment, he assimilates or absorbs. Of course, this is - you see they are working at odds with the new-found identification of many Negroes, who feel that there is something positive about their history, and they approach with mistrust any white who tries to take even that. In French, Langston Hughes says, "They done took our blues - they done took our blues and done gone." That's what Langston Hughes says, and what that means is that even this white man who has come down to help, if he starts to even take over the things that are - that I acknowledge and consider to be my of Negritude, then there's

a certain little animosity that might develop. How can I explain that? Of course, that kind of stereotype, with the eager liberal - the guy who pats you on the back who is avid about Civil Rights - who wants to help, has existed for me for quite a while. The whites who are so eager to know you because you are a Negro - or find you a very curious thing. I think that's stereotype truly. But, I think that there's a realization that's after you - I've been reading bitter articles, sort of, of an awareness, and this is mostly from New York, about the white liberals. The Negroes have found out that these white liberals with whom they plotted in dark rooms at night, really don't want to take the final step, which somehow means to them some sort of amalgamation of races. Or, really - really -

Warren: Means to whom amalgamation?

Moses: The white liberal. Really isn't - when - really isn't willing to, comes down to the obvious breaking down which is the integration of schools, or fair housing, that sort -

Warren: You mean that ^{the} Northern liberal is fine, as long as he's doing it in Mississippi.

Moses: Well, that's a great deal too. We find a lot of absolution of guilt -

Warren: He doesn't work around his own baliwick.

Moses: Yes, what ever, yes -

Murphy: Maybe part of it, maybe part of this stereotyping is made by the situation itself, or by people coming in - by white people coming down here, in that - coming to Mississippi that they don't represent their total political involvement, and the reason it does so is because the move is a violent transplanting of - it means that you come into a state, and for the first time in your life, politics is going to actually have a direct effect on the way you move, and eat and walk - the people with whom you can talk to and assemble with. I think - I've heard there comes a knowledge of having learned a good deal, and yet I think this has too to be tempered by the fact that you find that a state that is drastically far behind other states, that finally there is very little in terms of political subtlety to understand here. To some of us, nothing to understand. It's all going in one direction. Or, pretty much so.

Warren: What about this remark, which is sometimes made that the percentage, sometimes given as high, sometimes as low - of the people you are talking about who move in, say, to Mississippi to help, you know, but - to join them you see, the activists, have a stripe of emotional instability. This usually represents some sort of an askew emotional need, of one kind^{or}/of another. This is sometimes said. I've heard Negroes say it and I've heard Citizens' Council people say it.

And it's said in all tones of voice, you see. Does that make any sense, or is that not your impression?

Moses: It's not my impression.

Warren: Not your impression?

Moses: No. There's different ways of looking at it. It's - I would say that there are Negroes who join the Movement, who could come down with the Negroes who join it here and are askew, emotionally disturbed, sociologically. And, we find hoodlums joining the Movement; in the sense the people who have been bus-riders - the Freedom Riders when I first came down to meet them - when I met them here, I was surprised to find out how many people who would ordinarily be hanging out in the streets of Cleveland and were involved in fighting for freedom. Of course, I did find a core of intellectuals actually discussing and planning out, mapping out what was going on. But, I was surprised and disappointed to a great extent, that was a year and a half - no, two years ago, when I came down. You can look at it in two ways - a person trying to find himself, realize himself through some sort of commitment - through some sort of struggle, not necessarily through a cause - but somebody trying to determine himself, can be said to be askew emotionally. And, if he finds -

Warren: There are degrees, of course of these -

Moses: Yes, I'm not talking about - yes, I'm talking about the normal disturbance, that - and if it's backed by an honest and

a sincere attempt at self-evaluation as you progress, or as you work in the Movement, if you find things here that you can do that help realize who you are, then this would seem to me to be the path of struggle that everybody should finally go through and try to achieve.

Warren: It corresponds to basic human experience anywhere.

Moses: Yes. That this emotional disturbance can't be set ~~aside~~. It can't be made different from the paths and struggles of whatever someone to do, you know, something in the world. In other words, I'm - I don't know, it seems to me that the people come down here, and I would emphasize the Negroes who come here are, in fact, the most determined and intelligent - the majority of the Negroes who come here from the North are the ones who are the highest amount of thought in America. Of thought - who ^{at all -} represent no emotional instability/ or who simply - well - and I would say the whites who come down here have to be on the same level, who realize that something needs to be done and are willing to sacrifice and work towards whatever the coming - the second coming.

Warren: Well, would you make a comparison between the abolitionists of the '50's and the present white liberal on that basis? Would you say it was the same thing, or different?

Moses: I really don't know. I don't - try it.

Murphy: If I can get back to the thing that I was trying to

say before, I think that for the white liberal coming here, and the transplanting, unless I think there is something wrong if that person bolsters himself with the knowledge of political involvement, and with the knowledge of the immediacy of what he has learned, -

Warren: Is something wrong if he does that?

Murphy: No, I think - well, perhaps not wrong with the person, but I think there would be something that is going to be wrong if this continues to exist. In other words, there's a need for an approach, I think, that says, that certainly political involvement is immediate here, but it has to reflect back to the North and back to the complexities - back to our own background. And until the time that reflects in to the situation that we have known, or that we haven't really learned before in our own towns, then something is wrong here.

Warren: Yes, that is that some mere fallacy is in itself indulgence then, is that the idea? Unless it's seen as a national picture, rather than a sectional picture.

Murphy: Yes, because in other words, well, a Negro coming here has acquaintance already with racial problems and the need for racial solution. A white person coming here could or could not, and I think in many cases has not, and there's been a failure to look first in the North, before coming to the South. I think this just is - but that the majority of the people coming

here have not looked at their own communities in the North. The change has to come with their being able to reflect back.

Warren: Do you think that the realization of this as a national problem will take some of the heat off the Southern resistance, will take some of the heat out of the Southern resistance, will lower it? Because once you have it generally known here that the problem is not specifically Southern, but is a national problem, and international problem, that will take some of the resistance out of the Southerner?

Murphy: Yes, I do. I think so long as - well, it's not simply that - not simply a point of resistance, but it's also a strategy of Southern politicians to use the ideas of outside agitation and the idea of problems in Northern communities that are really worse, but that nobody is doing anything about.

Warren: You mean Southern politicians say this?

Murphy: Yes.

Warren: But now, what the real facts, ^{once} the fact is generally known in the South, would it lead to another interpretation too? The Southerners who now feel themselves special, caught with a special problem, with a special resistance, would have their resistance lowered when they realized that it was a national problem? For if you're going to have politicians, they're going to exploit this fact that they stay away because you have your own problems - to solve yours, before you bother with us, -

that's said all the time.

Murphy: That's being done.

Warren: But when the realization becomes more general - and the information becomes more - and the facts become more acute, you see, we have more New York, more Cleveland, more this and more that, that the heat - that the heat of the Southern resistance will diminish. As more Southerners see that this is really a national problem, that we don't have to feel that we are just stuck with it, you know, in our own special way - they can feel part of a national situation about it, rather than a special, cut-off - at the - in the thing of scorn, you see. See what I'm getting at? I'm not putting it very well.

Murphy: Well, restating what he said, you see, rather than giving him a question.

Warren: Well, is that what you were meaning then? Put it that way.

Murphy: Yes, I mean that if the regional - if the regional confinements can break down, I think if Southerners could possibly see themselves as part of an awakening that's occurring all over the nation, that certainly resistance would break down.

Warren: And you think this would be brought about, or perhaps promoted, at least, by the realization of a growing problem in the North.

Moses: Yes.

Warren: You think so?

Moses: Well, I believe so. Well, it operates - how it was operated it seems, we were discussing this before, was that the Movement, the present day Movement of the direct action started in the South. And, only when it started in the South, did direct action actually break out in the North. And, so it seems that the awakening was directly from the, whatever the Civil Rights activities that happened in the South, and that the awakening was - and now the people in the Northern communities are realizing the - certain discrepancies in the way they live. And, hopefully, Chicago - there'll be more Chicagos and more Clevelands and even more Chapel Hills - which had always regarded itself as the liberal community. And so that - well, so that what he said, that we will recognize that this is a national awakening here and that this will reduce a great deal of the resistance - or, at least, more Southerners will not be able to use this as a point of resistance, and, secondly, they will be forced to follow the examples of the solutions that will be much - will be had much quicker in Northern cities, I think. At least the verbal discussions that will be much more good.

Murphy: Yes, by the simple token of reporting, racial demonstrations in the North there is bound to be, I think, an awakening of the resources that a community could employ for improved

race relations in the South.

Warren: In the South?

Murphy: Yes.

Warren: I've heard it said since I've been in Jackson, as a matter of fact, and earlier in New Orleans, Negroes criticizing the leadership in both Atlanta lately, and Chapel Hill, as being ill-advised, ill-planned and confused. Does that make any sense to you?

Murphy: Well, I'm not at all well informed on the situation.

Warren: One argument being there that Chapel Hill had eighty per cent integration. Why not negotiate the way out, rather than having a - getting a drama.

Moses: Because - well, if you put it that way.

Warren: That's how one person put it to me. A very well informed Negro who is very active in Civil Rights. He said that. Whether it's true or not, I don't know.

Moses: I'm not - I-certainly they have tried negotiations with those places.

Warren: In Chapel Hill?

Moses: Yes, in Chapel Hill, and Atlanta, whereas I think that and in Atlanta I know for sure that the demonstrations are sponsored by SNEC. I think it's time now - that the time has come in these places that have, whether they have eighty per cent integration, or not, to not accept the lesser of two evils, and

I think the demonstrations in Atlanta are proper. They brought out a great deal of the contradiction of them being a liberal city - of that being a liberal city, and in fact that all these things weren't done, and Atlanta had been coasting for a long time on a liberal reputation that it had. And it only took people, it took people who were not afraid, who, let's say, were guided by the status quo which is chained the majority of Atlanta Negroes; the Negroes who are able to do things are simply chained by the fact that they are enmeshed in the economics and politics of Atlanta. And, it took people outside that system itself in order to bring into the mainstream of society, as I said before, the contradictions that Atlanta had. And, I think they were proper. I think that at all the revolution will be confused, and I don't think that they were ill-advised. As a matter of fact, I think this is -

Warren: Some of your friends think differently.

Moses: I know a lot of the friends think differently. The whole bit, Negro leadership is, you look for, find, the only way we can ever approach any sort of a solution is by this dialectic, I suppose. Why not? The majority of Negroes, I think, are afraid of action. Of SNEC - of the piercing clarity of which SNEC approaches the problem - the positive, radical approach - the clear, direct approach, of which I am for. Which I agree with.

Warren: What's your affiliation, if any? What's your affiliation? SNEC, or CORR, or do you have any?

Moses: Oh, no.

Warren: None at all?

Moses: No. I would be more likely to think of myself as SNEC, than any one of those others.

Warren: Let me shift ground right quick to something else.

How much anti-Semitism do you all detect among Negroes, either in the Movement, or among people outside it and simply naive or educated people? How much do you find? It's very strong in some places, in some sub-strata of society.

Moses: In the Movement I don't find it at all.

Warren: The NACP official in Philadelphia last year had quite a run-in with a national officer on that basis, remember? He made a speech. I forget his name.

Moses: Yes - Fuller - was that - not last year.

Warren: The year before then.

Moses: I don't - I'm not aware of it, go ahead.

Warren: Well, he's a local secretary or some such post, you see, or maybe a local president in Philadelphia, and he made a scathing anti-Semitic speech and then wouldn't take it back, either.

Moses: He got home office.

Warren: He's not in town.

Moses: I don't know if he's in -

Warren: How much I don't know though, you see.

Moses: I think the Negroes here aren't even aware of anti-Semitism.

Warren: Here, you mean, in Mississippi.

Moses: Yes, as such. As a definitely ^{sort of} institutionalized pressure. I don't think they're even aware of it. They may. Even the Negroes in Cleveland - the ones that I grew up with - talked about Funkies and Jews, money and all that sort of thing. Nobody - as far as it's being a definite - you know something that could be characteristic, I don't think of it in those terms.

Warren: Of course in Harlem so much of the property is owned by Jews. The landlords, and liquor store owners and the other stores, the businesses are largely in the hands of Jews, of course. I don't think I've read any percentage - it's very high.

Moses: Yes, well it's -

Warren: Yes, it takes many forms.

~~Moses:~~
Moses: Let me tell you before you go. Well, what I think the importance of SNCC and the importance of the of direction action is -

Warren: Yes, please do.

~~Moses:~~ It's based on the fact that each individual is of great deal of importance - that an individual element inside the can cause a change, and based self-assertion - up until I say

last month, there were only forty SNEC workers in Mississippi. And in and out forty SNEC workers have organized, and, of course with the help of - I'm not saying SNEC itself - I think the NACP and all the other organizations that have existed, that they have caused national attention and have brought national attention to Mississippi. Forty people in this whole State, individually have, say, turned the State upside down, at least the social arena. And, the whole importance of it to the direct action, of the direct action, and this is why I think it is propaganda in favor of thinking, rather than just a regular propaganda, or religious propaganda, is the importance of the individual. Is that - oh, I guess, that's the whole genesis of the thing. I just think that it's, the most modern, and the most modern, that's, in the view of, see, sensibility, modern sensibility, and the most direct and unequivocal approach that we have, in the racial situation. And I think it is the one thing that will accomplish - encompass poverty and the economic situation that has the universality to encompass the problems, say, of American culture, in general.

Warren: Sorry we're late. I've got to get a car and get on the road before 4:30 to go to Jackson by 7:30 - to Clarkville by 7:30. I should like nothing better than staying on with this.

Moses: I would like to tell you about the theatre.

Warren: Please do tell me some little bit about it before I go. Will you?

Moses: O.K. I will. I want to tell you because it's a thing. In the South we have the Negro audience. In Mississippi, where we have half of the population concentrated here. We have a chance, or the artist has the chance to involve the Negroes in a ritual, as you say the Muslims do, to involve them perhaps in a ritual in favor of thinking, and I say this because it's a term that stops my thinking. I got - which I - from reading Breck, who talks about taking nothing for granted, and if you take nothing for granted, therefore, nothing will seem unalterable or inalterable, and art has a direct relationship with this, because art seems to be the science of alteration, of transformation. And, which has been stifled here, - any possibility of change, see, the right of innovation and the right of - or right of change, or ability or the capacity of the possibility of change. And, a theatre here - yes, a theatre particularly, because on the stage you could show the different situations. You can show how the reality, in quotes - "reality" can change. We have - there's a chance here to show that - this on stage, thereby making the people, or having the people understand that perhaps reality, or what they had been accustomed to as reality is changeable. And, second, it's the collective religious phenomenon that we have, or the ritual that we can involve in

asthe theatre is concerned, by using the unique experience of the Southern Negro here, by collecting all his anxieties, say, and presenting them on stage - we can perhaps provide a direction that is certainly much more beneficial, I think, than the direction that's like Muslimism - or religion, because it's the direction that implies responsibility and self assertion. And, the theatre that was conceived under - and the theory out of those lines, and as a matter of fact, it's mostly theory - what I want to do with it.

Warren: Your theatre you mean.

Moses: My theatre. What I want to do with it. Matter of fact, I've only gotten to the point that I'm working with the students, and we're presenting different things of - we're improvising, so that we can free them from normal cliches, as far as that acting is concerned. Mostly, hopefully, we can free them - from these people that I work with here, we can perhaps create a unique style. A unique line of presentation, that is unique, that is as unique as jazz, or the blues, supposing - but this one is not built out of despair - this built out of actual responsibility. And people - one person said, "Well, you're talking about play therapy and play-acting, you know, whatever- and this is true. I'm using this with a very limited knowledge of what I'm supposed to have, I suppose, sociology as a play therapy sort of thing. But if I can get the

actors, a limited - if I can look towards the actors to finally get off that stage, or get on the stage and say that, "I alone am responsible for what happened and between the ^{hours of} two and three, the way I acted", and if I can get the audience - if I can transfer this - that they alone are responsible, and they alone - and they are of importance. The least little thing about them is important, why I think that all this can be accomplished, by the actual presentation of realities, alteration. So, that's the thing that underlines the theatre. The fact is that we have no material. That's one point. I've denounced almost the majority of plays that have been written up to this point, because they've been -

Warren: You've - been written poorly, that it.

Moses: They've been presented - for - say, Negro plays ^{written} /about Negroes, or ^{by} whites or Negroes, but mostly to be presented in a white audience. Only until Pearlre Victorius, have we heard of a Negro audience in New York supporting a play, and this is what went on. And because the plays had - were written within a white, necessary, sociological framework, not necessarily segregationist, sociological framework - I don't know exactly what is the distinguishing line. Except that they were written to be seen and participated in, and seen - spectated by, let's say, a sophisticated white audience - and for a white audience, period.

And I think that direction should be reversed. That we should write for the Negroes, which in turn can be understood, and will be understood and will have meaning to whites and Negroes. That is - if we turn towards the Negro audience here and write for the maids, write for the cotton ball workers, and write for the - in other words, at the theatre has a chance now to be something other than a bourgeois activity.

Warren: How does this relate to - compare with the proletarian - drama and the proletarian novel and poem of the thirties?

Moses: I guess it doesn't. It doesn't really differ.

Warren: It doesn't differ?

Moses: In the concept. I guess it doesn't, except that I'm not trying to - well, you see, when you speak of the proletarian, I'm not really trying to inculcate a dogma; I'm not trying to preach a dogma here.

Warren: Yes, there was a dogma involved there, of course.

Moses. Yes, I'm only trying to - I would only be trying to stimulate thinking.

Warren: Yes -

Moses: So - and in itself might be a dogma, in itself I might be, you know, distort. All I want to do is - for the first time I think it should be done, presenting the anxieties and the problems of the Negroes on stage, and therefore, the universality and the unanimity of the Negro problems will be - the unanimity

Note - The final half-page
of The Gilbert Moses inter-
view will be found at the
beginning of The Aaron Henry
interview.

[Gilbert Moses]

and universality of things will probably be shown, et cetera. And linking, and having the Negro audience understand them on those terms.

Warren: That's a fascinating prospect. I'd like to see some of your plays.

Moses: So would I.

Warren: Yes, I can imagine.

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[Aaron Henry]

Warren: As a starter I wonder if you could tell me how you first got interested in the N. A. A. C. P., in Civil Rights - Civil Rights Movement.

Henry: Well, Dr. Warren, I believe that it goes back to a point before I could even remember myself. One of the earliest experiences that I remember was the traumatic experience of being separated from a lad that I had known since birth, when it came time to go to school. And we were living in Derule. I was born in this county, and his parents and my parents were the best of friends and, of course, Randolph and I became inseparable. And, to have to go to one school and he to another at the age of six or seven was one of the early crises of my life, and I just never forgot about it.

Warren: This is a white boy, you mean?

Henry: Yes, Randolph was a white boy and I understand from my