

October 30, 1963

To: Professor Robert Penn Warren

From: L. H. Pollak

In thinking about whom you might want to interview, it seemed to me apparent at the outset that there were a handful of national Negro leaders whom you will want to talk to, if for no other reason than because they carry primary institutional responsibilities (although I think that each of them is quite evidently a person who, in his own right, has insights and capacities and experiences so rich as to warrant an extensive interview). At all events, these major leaders would be: Roy Wilkins, of the NAACP; Martin Luther King, Jr., of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; James Farmer, of CORE; James Forman and, perhaps, John Lewis, of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee ("Snick" as it is colloquially called); and Whitney Young, of the Urban League.

Of the foregoing, I know Wilkins and King well enough to write to them suggesting the fruitfulness of a conversation with you. If you would like me to write such a letter, I would be happy to do it. I should add, however, that I haven't the slightest doubt that these men, and most of the other persons you would be interested in talking to, would be glad to talk to you whether ~~or~~ I or anyone else writes a letter paving the way.

At the second level of leadership, I simply don't know enough about either CORE or Snick to know whom you should talk to. But I have no doubt that you will get immediate leads from your conversations with the top leaders.

In the national NAACP hierarchy, you should certainly talk to Clarence Mitchell, who is the NAACP's legislative representative in Washington; there may be others in the national bureaucracy you should talk to, but I don't

have enough information to direct you to particular people. Within the ranks of the NAACP there are probably a number of the regional leaders you should talk to, but I have only a hearsay knowledge of who these people are, and I think the best way to get guidance on them is by talking to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund lawyers (about whom I will say more in a moment) about the dispersion of leadership within the NAACP.

I really know nothing about the Urban League, and therefore can't tell you whom, other than Whitney Young, you should talk to -- with one exception. The one exception is the Director of the Urban League, in Chicago. Unfortunately, I don't recall his name, but I got to know him, and was much impressed by him, in a conference last January in which we were coparticipants*.

At the second level of leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, there are three people I think you should certainly talk to. First and foremost of these is Andy Young, as impressive a young man as I have met in years. (He had very important leadership responsibilities in Birmingham last May.) Next is Wyatt T. Walker, who is an extremely articulate, smart and bitter man -- he probably represents the SCLC's farthest leanings toward Negro nationalism. The third is Ralph Abernathy. (All three are ministers.) Incidentally, Walker and Abernathy are both clients of mine and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund: they are among the 11 defendants, including Bill Coffin, in the Freedom Rides case which began in Montgomery in May of 1960, and is now, I hope, headed for the Supreme Court.

The people I know best are the Negro lawyers. From the larger perspective, which will inform your interviewing and ultimate appraisals, this may seem a somewhat parochial segment of Negro leadership. However, it is a segment which has indubitably played a decisive role in the immediate past, and promises to play a very important role for some time to come. At all

* His name, I now recall, is Edwin C. Berry.

events, these are the people I know best, and so I will make some recommendations to you about them.

At the outset, I should explain that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, with which I have worked for the past ten years, is really a separate enterprise from the NAACP -- although, quite obviously, working relations are very close. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund is the law office which Thurgood Marshall directed until he became a federal judge two years ago. Initially, of course, Thurgood Marshall was the lawyer for the NAACP. But, at some point in the 1940s, it became desirable, for tax reasons, to separate out the potentially tax-exempt, legal assistance efforts of the NAACP from its other major activities which would not be tax-exempt -- e.g., lobbying for legislation. Curiously enough, in this instance, the impact of the tax laws was such that what started out as a ~~normal~~ ^{nominal} separation wound up as an actual division into two organizations which have wholly different offices, boards of directors, etc. It is, of course, true that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund draws most of its cases from people who turn for help to their local NAACP branch and are then referred by the branch to local Negro lawyers who are associated with the Legal Defense Fund. But I stress this separateness at the national level so that you can have in mind the fact that the policies which underlie the administration of the enormous case load of the Legal Defense Fund are not laid down by Roy Wilkins and/or his Board of Directors, and/or his mass membership. Moreover, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund also acts as the principal legal resource for the other major Negro action movements -- CORE, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. I don't mean that the Legal Defense Fund is formally retained on any permanent basis as counsel for these organizations. I simply mean that the Legal Defense Fund is the resource to which most of these people turn as and when they find themselves in court.

Now for the personalities of the legal bodies: First of all, the NAACP (as distinct from the Legal Defense Fund) has had, for the past several years, its own general counsel. This man is Robert L. Carter, and he was at one time Thurgood Marshall's principal assistant. I think he feels himself in some sense a disadvantaged competitor of the far larger, richer and more active Legal Defense Fund. Carter is a very nice person, and of good, although not extraordinary, ability. He is not, I think, a person whom you indispensably have to talk to; on the other hand, I think you might find it politically sensible to speak to him if you speak to a number of lawyers in the field.

The director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund is Jack Greenberg, who is Thurgood Marshall's successor. Greenberg, as perhaps you have already guessed, is not a Negro. He is, however, the one non-Negro who, in my humble judgment, you absolutely have to talk to. He is a person of extraordinary capacity and insight. Moreover, you will find him extremely congenial. You should also talk to Mrs. Constance Baker Motley, who is Jack Greenberg's deputy. She is a marvelously handsome, poised and articulate woman. She is a very important figure on the merits (e.g., she had pretty much sole responsibility for the extensive litigation about James Meredith's admission to the University of Mississippi). Also she is certainly important as being one of the very few Negro women in a position of national prominence and leadership. Assuming you want to devote a day to talking to lawyers all collected in the same office, a third lawyer at the Legal Defense Fund whom I would commend to you is James Nabrit, III. (His father, James Nabrit, Jr., is President of Howard University, and a former dean of Howard Law School -- a sort of elder statesman whom I think you also should talk to but in a category I will get to in a moment.) Young Jim Nabrit is, I think, one of the most mature -- or

perhaps I should say "normalest" -- people of my acquaintance. I think he can talk to you with a balance and humor that you will find quite rare -- although, I would add, one of the things that has always struck me about the Negro lawyers with whom I have worked is their high capacity for normality in the midst of a life and pressures which would seem to me calculated to push them in a very different direction.

As you talk to Jack Greenberg, Connie Motley and Jim Nabrit you will probably get a feeling for some of the leading Negro lawyers practicing regionally whom you might want to talk to, especially as you travel through the South. There are three lawyers to whom I can direct you on my own say-so. They are William T. Coleman, Jr., a one-time law clerk of Felix Frankfurter, and today a partner in the Philadelphia law firm of ex-Mayor Dilworth. A second is William R. ("Bob") Ming, Jr., who has his own law firm in Chicago (for a time he was on the University of Chicago law faculty); a third is Wiley Branton, who was the chief local attorney throughout the events in Little Rock. He is now temporarily based in Atlanta, where he exercises a sort of general supervision over all the voter registration efforts of the various interested groups. (He works closely with and his office is directly adjacent to the Southern Regional Conference.) Also in Atlanta you might want to talk to Donald Hollowell.

In addition to the presently active civil rights lawyers mentioned above, you should talk to a representative sampling of the legal elder statesmen. I have mentioned one -- President James Nabrit, Jr., of Howard. Judge Thurgood Marshall of the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York is, of course, a second. Judge William Hastie, of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Philadelphia -- one-time NAACP lawyer, dean of the Howard Law School, and Governor of the Virgin Islands -- is certainly a third. Ralph Bunche is a fourth. And Spottswood Robinson, immediate past dean of the Howard Law School, and just named by President

Kennedy to be a federal judge in Washington is a probable fifth.

All the lawyers and "elder statesmen" (except for Ralph Bunche), mentioned above, are people whom I know pretty well and would be glad to write to on your behalf, if you would like me to do so. It occurs to me that there is one other category of persons whom I know, some of whom you might be interested in talking to -- Negroes of no national prominence whatsoever, but who are right here in New Haven, people who have leadership responsibilities or are in some other sense likely to be well worth talking to. Two local leaders in this highly fractionated community whom I would principally commend to you are Rev. Edwin Edmonds, of the Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church, and Alphonso Tindall, Director of the Dixwell Community House, and also a colleague of mine on the New Haven Board of Education. More fruitful than a conversation with either of these, however, would I think be a conversation with our friends, Nan and Clarence Rogers. They are both transplanted Southerners, who are now school teachers residing in New Haven. This year Mrs. Rogers, who is the really remarkable member of the pair, is on leave so that she can study at the Bank Street College in New York City, but she gets home weekends. When you talk to Nan and Clarence Rogers, you realize that these are the people whom the whole fight for a democratic society is all about.

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You will ~~already have~~ ^{have already} noted some obvious omissions in the foregoing categories. For one thing, I haven't said anything about individual Negroes who have achieved prominence in the arts or in other fields which are not primarily functions of the civil rights movement. Frankly, I thought it

presumptuous of me to make recommendations to you in this area, since (other than James Baldwin, whom I have met) I don't know any of these people personally. Also, you will see that I have omitted one major institutional grouping -- namely, the Black Muslims. Here, again, I simply don't know any of the people involved. (You may have noticed, however, that Malcolm X is scheduled to speak here in New Haven tomorrow, Thursday, October 31, at 7 p.m., at the Bassett Junior High School. That may not be a promising spot for him to be interviewed, but I suppose mere observation also has its place.)