

RPW: This is Tape 3 of a conversation with Mr. James Forman - proceed. What about the role of the - quotes - white liberal who, James Baldwin says, is an affliction - role in the Negro movement. Has he a role? Has he a place besides being an affliction?

JF: What do you mean by white liberal? How would you define it?

RPW: Well, I'd have to ask James Baldwin what he meant.

JF: Yes, but, well - then I think that, you know -

RPW: The white man, then.

JF: Well, now, there (laughing) - there are white men and there are white men - (remark by RPW) - well, I don't know if that's my responsibility. But, you know, I think that there are whites who work within SNICK who play a very important role, who are respected, and ~~with~~ whom there's no quarrel that one could have with. On the other hand, I think that there are certain whites, on the other hand, who are prepared to support your movement from afar, who are prepared to wish you well, and then on the other hand, when sometimes the going gets rough, then, you know, he's ready to pull back or if you move in and around his neighborhood, you know, he's not prepared to accept that. And let me just say that here again, lacking a definition - a definition publicly and also one privately of what a white liberal is, then I really just can't make too many comments, because I don't understand what the term is.

RPW: You couldn't find a vaguer term, clearly. But the well meaning, fellow traveling friend, I guess, you would say.

JF: Whatever that means.

RPW: Whatever that means, yes. Malcolm X says that even the white man who goes to jail with you is doing it for his own reasons.

JF: Well, I think that all of us are doing it for our own reasons, fundamentally. I mean, you know, everybody that - we ought to know enough about psychology to recognize that people have varying personal reasons for doing certain things, and many times that's irrelevant, you know. It's what's the social effect of what a person is doing that's important.

RPW: Let's go back to the private school-public school business a moment, and the question of defending the best opportunity for one's child - as one position - sometimes opposed in the same man's heart to his interest in public education, like Mr. ~~Gilamson~~ - his case - agreed not to criticize. Suppose we have a man who's opposed to the long range bussing on the same grounds. This man might be the Negro or white.

JF: Well, you know, people - (remark by RPW) - people are entitled to their opinions. The whole question is, will their opinions become the majority opinions.

RPW: Well, we can leave it at that. That's always the case. Who wins? If the only question of power is who wins, then we wipe out the question of ethical consideration, don't we?

JF: Not necessarily. Not necessarily at all. I mean, I would grant the segregationist the right to lead in segregation, but at the same time he has to recognize certain ethical questions or - and certainly

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others must recognize this, and I don't think that - and maybe it's very flippant to say, you know, it's a question of who wins, and I wouldn't - I must say that that's not just the position, who wins, you know, because I think that there are moral considerations or ethical considerations that enter into all decisions in a sense, and it's not just a question of who has the most might and has the most power and who can then push down the throat of somebody else his own position.

RPW: The point I was pushing at is this - if we grant that the Reverend Gulammuson, who believes in the public schools system, and fights for it, at the same time puts his child or children in a private school, he's carrying on two obligations at the same time that don't happen to match ~~from~~ point to point. Now, the parent, white or Negro, who objects to the bussing because it's bad for my child - you see, I believe in the public school system but it's bad for my child - I'm defending my child's best interest in opposing the bussing, and I believe in integration. That's parallel to Mr. Guallamuson isn't it - ethically parallel, isn't it?

JF: Well, I don't think so - and I'm not much of a philosopher, but it seems to me that you have two considerations. I mean, the act of putting one's child in a private school is a voluntary act. A person has agreed to pay for it. On the other hand, involving the child in a public school, you know, then you're subjecting the child - I mean, not subjecting, but the whole concept is that in terms of the public

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school facilities, that integration is a desirable thing, and I don't think that the two are ethically the same in a sense.

RPW: Well, integration we'll say is desirable.

JF: Well, then in addition to that, though. But you see, I'm not sure of the relevance of all this - I really am not, I mean.

RPW : It becomes relevant for a man to take a position on the question. He has a child, and which side is he on on the bussing problem? Where does the knife edge fall? He may be for integration, but everything has a cost. He says this is too much - I'm going to pay - you know - an hour on the bus, or two, or whatever the time is on the bus. You might say it that way. I'm and competing here now. I left my child's good - or what he assumes to be his child's good. I'm saying this problem exists as an intellectual and moral question which can be debated on high terms and not the good guy's terms.

JF: Well, very well the case, and I hadn't thought about it. As a matter of fact, I haven't given too much consideration to the whole problem of integration in schools in the North in a sense. You see, because I think that fundamentally that all of these measures are simply stopgap measures.

R PW: Let's agree on that.

JF: They are basically stopgap measures, and that you really have to - I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't do it because it's a way of forming opinions, but I think that the more fundamental things wrong

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with the society that have to be corrected before these things can be -

RPW: Like getting better schools.

JF: Like getting better schools, like eliminating other structures of segregation, like trying to wipe out certain myths, certain ideas, like getting rid of all the Southern Dixiecrats down there who help to perpetuate these myths and so forth.

RPW: After you had - let's assume something - civil rights bill with teeth in it - effective - fair employment practice - codes effectively administered or decent housing codes effectively administered - integration of schools, say - then what? What problem lies beyond that? What great problem?

JF: You haven't mentioned the whole question of voting. You see, because none of these things -

RPW: Let's say voting - let's add voting - let's include that. Let's add voting.

JF: Establish the principle of one man, one vote.

RPW: All right, we've got all those things in the bag. Then what? Anything remain to be done?

JF: All right, let's state them again. We've got one man, one vote?

RPW: One man, one vote; integration of schools and public accommodations; fair employment practice; general civil rights - all these things in force, you see. With good intention and fair efficiency. Then what? What remains?

JF: Well, -

RPW: As a racial question?

JF: Well, I hoped that that would be the end. I don't know what would come up, but it seems to me that, you know, men either before that or concurrent with that, one must begin to work in some of these other fundamental causes, of poverty and the whole question of reform within the society. I'm not sure that you will - you see, I'm not sure - and maybe this is where I'm pessimistic - that you're not going to have to have some type of militant action to watch over people's opinions. Now - I think that - wait just a moment, I think that if you have these things, you see, that then you would have the basis of addressing - you could address yourself to more fundamental problems in the society, and then maybe that would be an absence in the sense of racial segregation - the skepticism obviously grows out of my own experience that people might have, that you're going to have a lot of perhaps infractions of that kind of a situation. But maybe ultimately - and we're speaking now obviously in terms of a hundred to a hundred and fifty years, you know. Because I don't think all this is going to come in my lifetime, you know - I don't - or my children's lifetime. I don't have any kids, but - so that you would have obviously - the outward removal of these things and what you'd have to guard against is the subjective opinions of people creeping out and again expressing racial attitudes. Do you see what I mean?

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RPW: Yes, your militant supervision of opinion - is that the phrase you used?

JF: That's right. So that they daren't - so that this opinion does not creep into - opinion does not then form some sort of movement contrary to what is right and is the public will.

RPW: This is a little off the point, but it crosses my mind - what do you think about leaving Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn unexpurgated on the public school shelves?

JF: I never read it. I don't know if it's a good book or not. But a lot of authorities have said it's a very good book, so that I'd have to reserve judgment until I read it.

RPW: When I asked Dr. King a question phrased differently, but the same thing, about the phases of the Negro question, you see, the third phase being after the civil rights and such had been put on the books, he said that it corresponds to the third phase of the Gandhian program. He said, to paraphrase, Operation Bootstrap for the Negro, to raise standards.

JF: Well, - you know, I would be in fundamental disagreement with an Operation Bootstraps among Negroes at this level, in that I would think that what you would have to do, that the Operation Bootstrap would have to come as a sort of government sponsored program in a sense. In other words, I don't think that Negroes ought to even try to assume the responsibility of going around here saying that in Mississippi we're going to teach every Negro to read or write. That's

a governmental function and the government is the only person capable of doing anything about it.

RPW: All right, but raising standards is not only a matter of -

JF: Well, what does it mean, then? What do you mean by raising standards? What are you talking about?

RPW: Well, I guess what applies to all society. The willingness to say we are going to change the level performance within this town, this state, this race, this community.

JF: Yes, but you see - you know - you see, here again, and this is - (talking together) see, this is exactly what I'm trying in terms of watching opinion, you know, because if you had this third phase and then you said, O.K. now, the Negro has got to raise himself up to be accepted in this society, or so that he can be like the other white people, then by definition you still have an opinion that regards him as something different.

RPW: All right, de facto inferiority has existed in certain whites and certain Negroes. They are underprivileged, and they are simply inferior performers because they lack motivation and lacking training.

JF: That's right. O.K. So it seems to me that it's a question of who is going to do the Operation Bootstrap, you know. I mean, is the society going to take a public posture and say, O.K. you know, we're going to have this crash program as we've had in Appalachia, are we going to say that we're going to go into Mississippi, the government

is going to have crash programs to wipe out illiteracy, or is it then going to be that we will all become Urban Leagues, you know, and it's up to the Negro to do that. That I think is relevant. And I don't think that you can evade it. And at the point, not only is that relevant but it then becomes the whole question of raising the levels of society also.

RPW: The point there that Dr. King I'm sure would not preclude any kind of governmental action or governmental subsidy. He would not say don't do that. He would emphasize the fact of the will of the Negro as a minority to change its level. Not to have it done for it but to participate in the doing.

JF: Yes, well, obviously people - you know, the government can't do anything for people that people are not prepared to do for itself, but I think maybe we ought to understand some of the background out of which I speak. I mean, I'm in Mississippi now and I'm dealing with people, or we're dealing with people who are illiterate. People are saying well, you know, if the Negro would scrub his face, if he'd wear clothes, if he'd comb his hair, and maybe if he would use two bottles of Mum, maybe if he would learn to read and write, then O.K. then maybe he would be acceptable to the American white society, you know. And I say that the whole problem of literacy in the state of Mississippi is not the fundamental problem of SNICK or any other civil rights organization, that this is a problem to which the entire society has to address itself and is only capable of doing it

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because of the resources, you see. And, I mean, obviously the people are going to respond and are responding now to the low classes that we are holding, you see. But don't - you know, don't go - don't let's not revert back to what I think is sometimes Booker T. Washington philosophy. Let's pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps because it can't be done. It just cannot be done.

RPW: Well, there are ways and ways of helping oneself and your organization is one way.

JF: Of course, of course, and then, you know, I hope we hurry up and go out of business, you know. I really do. And - but at the same time I think that we have to recognize that a lot of the problems we might have a fair employment practice act but then we may not have any jobs, both for Negroes or whites, which leads -

RPW: something else.

JF: You know, which raises another question, and that question is, I'm not trying to defer all types of planning, but I don't know what these hypothetical situations really signify because there are a lot of variables. I mean, one, we all may be destroyed in terms of thermo-nuclear war, you know.

RPW: That's something else.

JF: If we can hold everything constant, you know, which, you know, obviously cannot happen in this world, then I think that we could really address ourselves to that question. But maybe I'm - you know, I just might give them - postulating certain answers before I can see

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that the answers are really relevant in a sense, and I don't see where that kind of an analysis is now relevant.

RPW: It's relevant in this sense - it indicates differences in basic attitudes among people. For instance, talking about a speech by Dr. King, Wyatt Walker said this fellow speaks of I myself - he - Mr. Walker would make to all Negro gatherings but not to a place where you had the white press, you see. That the Operation Bootstrap or the self-help, self-improvement sort of line which could be that's Booker T. Washington all over again. We don't say that in certain communities - certain groups. It should be said behind closed doors, as it were. The Negro college, the Negro school, the all-Negro audience. This is one point of view about that whole question of the obligation of attitude - not the capacity. It's clearly - clearly a minority group is not going to have the resources to do a crash program for itself. But an attitude toward its own responsibility toward the program.

JF: Yes, but the question now, you know, is who does the program. You see - and then of course you realize, you know, I mean, that's your moral judgment also.

RPW: It's a question I'm raising anyway.

JF: Yes, well, O.K. But at the same time - you see, my position is that, you know, if - I've answered this hypothetical problem, in that I feel that at that stage then, you know, the Negro should - his resources should be involved in doing this for people, you see.

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As a matter of fact, I mean, I think it should - you know, we should begin to do more and more of this as of now. I don't think that we ought to just wait, you know, until we've reached this millennium.

RPW: The phases (talking together)

JF: That's right. That's - again, that's very true. And not only are they simultaneous but that even now it's a basic responsibility of this government to institute some of these programs. I mean, we ought to be eliminating poverty not only in Appalachia but in the Delta of Mississippi. We ought to eliminate literacy now - illiteracy in that state. We shouldn't wait until you think that Negroes have the right to vote because, you know, there's, you know, a lot of simultaneous relationships as we have both indicated.

RPW: What do you understand by Freedom Now? - the slogan.

JF: I presume you meant Theodore White's article, who is very apologetic about it as I understand -

RPW: Which article?

JF: In Life Magazine - where he criticizes Freedom Now?

RPW: I haven't read it - no.

JF: I see. Well, I think that as far as I'm concerned Freedom Now is a slogan, and it's a slogan that is used in terms of motivating people to come out of their apathetic positions, to grapple with the whole questions of _____ and to recognize the social change is possible. It's quite obvious that there cannot be, you know, any kind of universal freedom now for any man, you know, I mean, because if you want to get philosophically, where does one's freedom

begin, you know, the freedom is limited the minute that the mother puts a diaper on the baby, you know. So that - but I think that it is an appropriate slogan, and a slogan that has challenged the imagination of the Negro and has presented to the American public a spirit, a driving force, which is characteristic of the Negro movement. The term Freedom Now actually developed in Africa, and it had extreme relevance for people in Ghana, in that it meant the end of colonialism and the beginning of a new independent nation. Gradually we began to adopt the slogan in the United States, just as the whole slogan One Man, One Vote, had its roots in Africa, and we're beginning more and more to use it in this country. But I think both slogans are extremely relevant. I don't know if I've answered your question as to what Freedom Now means to me, but it's basically a slogan used as a motivational device.

RPW: There are some people who confuse the motivation or poetic quality of the slogan, with practical objective.

JF: Well, you know -

RPW: People differ.

JF: That's right. People differ.

RPW: What about the relation of the Negro middle class to the Negro movement. How do you read that?

JF: Well, you know, whatever the Negro middle class is and however we define it, we have to define it as a class, as a caste society within a class structure, you see. And that it's affected by racial discrimination. On the other hand, you know, if there are any basic

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disagreements with the Negro middle class it's a disagreement with all the middle class American life in the sense that - you know, better life for yourself, better life for your kids, the whole question of people suffering is not necessarily relevant to your existence. I think that what is often postulated as middle Negro class or the middle class Negro is in many instances not really middle class in the traditional terms. I think that there are, you know, a lot of Negroes who are fairly well off, but I think that - also the Negro middle class, you know, hampers a lot of racial progress, you know.

RPW: You said earlier - that's what I'm getting at.

JF: Yes, it does.

RPW: It doesn't feel itself committed? to the Negro movement?

JF: Yes, it feels itself committed to certain advantages for that class. Like for instance in Atlanta, you know, you've got a lot of good middle class Negro homes - (talking together) - but at the same time there's no mass movement on these people to do something for the poor Negro in Buttermilk Bottom, you know.

RPW: Has there been an increase of identification between the Negro middle class and the Negro masses or a decrease in recent years, or can you estimate that?

JF: Well, I think that the struggle has, you know, forced sort of greater cooperation. I don't think that there's been any decrease, but I don't think that the increase has been such that we need to, you know, wave banners and shout for joy, you know.

RPW: One theory is that it's been actually, while theoretically an increase of communication, a feeling, there has been a de facto decrease because it was split between the prosperity of the Negro middle class and the depressed mass had become greater - there's been actually a widening of the gulf between, say, the depressed Mississippi Negro and the depressed Harlem Negro and the prosperous middle class. Economically the split has become wider. That's one theory at least.

JF: Well, I don't know. I mean, I guess that that could statistically be proven. I just don't happen -

RPW: It's been claimed that it can be.

JF: O.K. But even if that - even the fact that that might be statistically proven does not necessarily mitigate the fact that many middle class individuals may have become aware of their social responsibilities and so from that point, that there can be a close alliance. As a matter of fact, I think that what the student movement or protest movement in this country has done is to just raise questions now to the middle class and I guess to the leaders or the rulers of the country in a sense the whole question of poverty. There's been - a dialogue is being created. I mean, I think that the whole question of the Appalachian program would not have become very significant if there had not been students who went into the Appalachians and began to relate these things, and then began to pressure the administration, and I think we have to do more of this.

RPW: The Appalachian thing is really a backlash from the Negro movement?

JF: Well, I'm not - I don't want to claim all of that, but I think it's relevant. Yes, I think so. I really do.

RPW: I should think so too, and I guess that it is, but -

JF: But a lot of people have been working down there.

RPW: In a mass movement there is a number of people in a position of leadership, there's bound to be, it seems to me, some overreaching in the struggle for control. I don't mean a struggle necessarily of mere power but policy. This means more and more promises made, more and more appeals of different sorts made. Have you seen in the present movement this process leading toward centralization of power? Classically it winds up with one man, you see.

JF: Yes, well, (not distinct)

RPW: You don't see that?

JF: No, because I think that what's happening is that there is more and more decentralization. I think that ACT is an example of decentralization of ~~power~~ policy making within the Negro movement. I think the SNICK is another example of decentralization of policy making. Even SCLC is a form of decentralization of policy making, and to some extent CORE, and if there's one organization that one could say that there's a spreading away from, it would be the NAACP, which over the years has been sort of a be one organization that was involved in making policy relative to the Negro, and you've seen a mushrooming of organizations and protest movements in the last seven or

eight years, and that's good.

RPW: You remember Mr. Wilkins remark at Alexandria?

JF: Yes, what about that - we do the work and pay the bills and the other organizations make the noise and get the credit? Well, he's wrong, you know.

RPW: Wrong how?

JF: Well, if that's what he said, I mean, then it's not true, you know, because there are some of us who would feel that we're doing the load work but certainly not doing much work.

RPW: He didn't say no work, he said - we pick up the chips - the tab, the bill, when it's over. We're the continuing organization.

JF: Well, that's not true either, I mean - and he knows that that's not true.

RPW: He would say it was true at the time.

JF: Well, it wasn't true at the time. He knows that.

RPW: There are so many questions I'd like to get at, but I feel it's an evidence of the last few seconds, you know, now. James Baldwin says that the Southern mob does not represent the will of the Southern majority.

JF: I think he's right.

RPW: You do?

JF: I think the Southern mob is a reflection of the Southern politician and the Southern power structure - the police, you see - I think that the real culprits of the South are not the so-called poor whites that people sometimes like to cast
But basically

those politicians who control opinion and who decide policy in a given situation, I mean, in their economic counterparts.

RPW: Do you happen to think, to agree with the theory that the two hung juries in the Beckwith trial were rigged - was a drama arranged beforehand? This is a view that's in print, you see, and it's held by a certain number of people in Mississippi, including the sheet passed out by the NAACP, for instance, as a possibility. Mr. Evers said he didn't believe it, but he said (indistinct).

JF: Well, I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, it very well may have been in that, you know - but I don't know - I question it.

RPW: It takes a lot of doing, doesn't it?

JF: Yes. I would question it. What I think that happened was that the people clearly knew that Beckwith was a killer and then there was some that didn't want to convict him.

RPW: If that's the case, that trial historically is very important then.

JF: It is. No, I think that the climate of Southern opinion is changing. No, I don't think that there's any question about that. I was acquitted in a case in Alabama.

RPW: Where was this, now?

JF: This was in Fort Payne, Alabama, right up in the northeast section, you know.

RPW: What was the date of this case?

JF: It was a year ago, at the time of the freedom walks.

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RPW: Oh, yes, yes. I remember that.

JF: They were important.

RPW: Yes. Alabama is much more mixed than Mississippi anyway. Much more dissent there.

JF: That's right. That's true. And of course both Wallace and Mississippi are trying to suppress all sorts of dissent, you know.

RPW: Well, you're a free man now. Let's knock it off. Thank you very very much.

JF: I hope I helped you.

RPW: You did. You helped a lot.

JF: Thanks a lot.

RPW: End of interview - end of interview.

(end of tape)