

Tape #3
April 15.

SECOND CONVERSATION WITH DR. KENNETH CLARK

A. That is, you are more willing to trust the orderly process of law and the long range historical process giving human guidance and--

B. And vigilance -- human guidance and vigilance.

A. - - and vigilance, without asking for an rebilitory
moment to change human nature, is that it?

B. Or conversion -- yes. I don't feel happy with myself in my skepticism about any meaningful chances of moral conversion among human beings -- I wish that I could believe in it, but to be quite candid with you, I don't and can't.

A. Lets switch the question of this moment and "the movement" or "the revolt", whatever you choose to call it, and in the concept of revolution -- how much of this resemble a revolution, all we need is just words here -- is it a revolution? We talked about this before a little bit but didn't get very far with it.

B. Well, I think the term "revolution" is sort of a catch phrase and has some kind of ~~axxiupast~~ a dramatic impact, but I don't think it is too helpful to describe the Civil Rights Movement today. Revolution to me denotes -- first thing that comes in my mind of course, is the use of military methods and weapons, which obviously is not possible here. The second thing is -- maybe even more important -- desire to change the total political, the social and the economic structure -- this is clearly not indicated here. What I think the Negro is asking for is not a change in the total social, political and economic structure of this system -- all he is asking for is in. He is asking to be included, he is asking -- Look, I like this system so much, I want to be a part of it -- you see.

A. How does this relate then, to the notion of -- not going to integrate with the burning house.

B. That is Baldwin's phrase -- and Helen Hansbrough --

A. Is it Helen? Louise, isn't it?

B. No, no -- anyway, we find it -- No, I think this is a cry of anguish and despair, not to be taken too literally -- I mean because if you just look at -- ask yourself the question "What choice", "What other choice?"

A. That is a rational question, but there may be some deep~~er~~ dissatisfaction with American middle class values involved here, though, it makes one say that.

B. Well, look -- the guys who work for Time and Life over on Madison Avenue have deep dissatisfaction with American middle class values, but that doesn't - - -

A. I don't blame them either, to tell you the truth.

B. I don't blame them, but they don't reject it -- they still live in Hastings, in Great Neck, they still buy the status cars -- large or small, depending upon the particular fashion. I don't want to seem -- disarrange out of hand, these comments, except that again I have to respect your question and I give the best possible answer I can.

A. It is a real question, though.

B. Except that it isn't a real question, because there are no choices, there are no alternatives here.

A. Suppose by people of all sorts, whose words we must listen to -- like Baldwins for example -- this is a real question.

B. Baldwin to me, is one of the most disturbing, irritating, incisive critic of our society at this time, you see. But this doesn't

mean that Baldwin has the answers all the time -- I mean, Baldwin expresses anguish, Baldwin expresses frustration, concern -- you know -- and a wish for something better, in the sense of a totality of betterness; and he also expresses the feeling that maybe he isn't going to get even the minimum, so therefore, forget everything else, in a sense -- you see. I want to continue about Baldwin, because I think what Baldwin is expressing, is his -- his desires, you see, what he would like human beings to be like -- what he would like the society to be like. Maybe what Baldwin has not yet understood and probably never should understand -- maybe he should never accept the possibility that there might be a tremendous gap between what he would like and what can be, because this might reduce his potency, his power as a passionate, incisive critic of what is. I repeat -- Lorraine Hansbury and Jim Baldwin have no choice other than to be incorporated within this society and this culture, pretty much as it is, you see. Now, what I will entertain the possibility of, is that if America is capable of including the Negro more into the fabric of its society, this will on its face strengthen the society -- not necessarily change it, you see -- not necessarily change ~~its values~~ ^{its values} ~~but~~ but make the existing values less liable to internal decay --

A. Yes, sure. Let me ask another question about the over-reaching techniques all social moves have, even those short of revolution-- every leader must promise more than the last leader, he has to promise more excitement or more resort or more this or more that -- bigger and better demonstrations -- more and more radical demands -- more of this. How much of this present over-reaching is not going on before our eyes in the struggle for power? The struggle for power may be a struggle for putting up effective policy -- in the struggle for power,

I don't mean necessarily in a cynical sense. We clearly see an escalating process going on of the over-reaching in more and more demonstrations, more and more radical demand, the more and more rich promise . What do you make of this ~~apparent~~ process of this apparenacy before -- at the beginning now -- in earnest.

B. Well, I think you have to look at that in terms of layers of leadership. At the top level of Negro leadership, I don't think this is an accurate description of the process. I think you don't see--

A. No, but people like Galiason -- poor people and also other - -

B. That is right. What we do have now in the Civil Rights Movement as I see it, is a struggle for of leadership, or would-be leaders -- what I would call publicly, maybe wildcat leaders -- fitting your description of this process. I really don't know how seriously --

A. I am not referring to Mr. Wilkins or Mr. Farmer -- no --

B. Or Whitney Young or Martin Luther King -- these seem to me extraordinarily sensitive, responsible statesmenlike men, not willing to compromise one iota on the goal, but who certainly present evidence of tremendous flexibility in methods, in techniques. But then you have on local levels, individuals who have a freedom that comes where one does not have responsibility, and who seem to be pushing the Civil Rights movement by techniques and approaches which are some people questionable.

A. I was talking yesterday on the telephone with Adam Clayton Powell -- making a date for such an occasion as this -- and he said, ~~was~~ "Well, leadership -- the old line is washed up, nothing left of it now, its washed up" he said "We will find it with the people like , we will find it with the people like the group in Harlem, we

will find it here and there

washed up.

They have only nine hundred thousand followers anyway.

B. I don't agree with Mr. Powell - - -

A. It is on this lecture, you see, they are washed up, they are through.

B. I don't think that is true at all -- not only are they not washed up and not through, but I think that ~~they~~ their role is going to become increasingly important as the more dramatic techniques run their course. I mean, I feel very strongly that the more dramatic flamboyant approaches that have a role -- they have a role of dramatizing the issue, you know, of focusing it -- but they don't resolve anything.

A. What about the stall-ins now, what utility would they have?

B. The only utility that I can possibly see in this is to raise the irritation level of the issue tremendously, and require some kind of resolution -- I think that stall-ins and all these other techniques make stagnation impossible.

A. Yes, what would you do about the stall-ins, if you were the mayor of New York or head of the police department?

B. If I were mayor of New York or head of the police department, I would get them the hell out of the way -- I would get them out as quickly as possible -- I would open up the highways as quickly as possible and I would not tolerate that kind of activity one moment, you see. If I were leader of the stall-ins, I would try to make it as uncomfortable and as difficult for the mayor of the city of New York and the police commissioner to do their job as I possibly could.

A. But this is describing -- this is descriptive, you see. You are saying -- you don't choose sides, , let the

devil take the -- let them fight it out, as it were. -- this man fulfill the role, let the other man fulfill the other role.

B. I certainly would. -- but what would I do personally? Hell, I ~~ax~~ would not join the stalls -- I would not participate in that any more than I think I would participate in John Brown's band or in Malcolm X's --

A. Well, do you approve of the stall-ins -- or you won't participate?

B. No, I do not approve the stall-ins, but I do not think my approval or disapproval is in any way relevant to whether those people are going to have a stall-in or not -- or relevant to whether the mayor of the city -- in fact, if the mayor of the city of New York and the police commissioner did not do their duty, as a citizen I would seriously question my vote for that -- but that is another problem, I mean - actually these problems have to be dealt with by whatever ways people come up with dealing with them.

A. What do you think of the fact that a man who sat on the Summit Committee in Atlanta, the Summit Meeting in Atlanta -- said the man, who should now be nameless, whose name we all know -- had written a memorandum "We must get some heads broken by the police here in Atlanta -- these police are too nice -- we have got to get some bloodshed out of this, otherwise we are going to lose".

B. Gee, I can't imagine anyone -- well, I can't imagine myself--

A. The police did not oblige -- Negro policemen to handle this.

B. I think they were wise, and I think that the police in Birmingham and in Jackson, Mississippi, were unwise -- they were not only unwise, they were stupid.

A. They were insane. Is this --

B. But by the way -- I think that the police in Birmingham and the police in Jackson, inadvertently contributed more to the Civil Rights issue, than the police in Atlanta.

A. Alright -- but here is the point, you see -- given that fact and say you are on the Summit Committee, and given this realistic fact-- in Birmingham the police ~~me~~ did no end of good for Civil Rights, and in Jackson, they for Civil Rights, they x give it publicity.

B. And in Atlanta, they don't.

A. They don't -- they have very well-mannered, courteous, ^{Negro} policemen who carefully escort -- patty wagon -- and they get no bloodshed, they get no publicity -- they get negotiation and then they go on again. Now, what about -- the memorandum is on the table -- "We have got to get some heads broken this time, or else we are not making it".

B. I would not personally write any such memorandum -- I don't want to see people's heads get broken --

A. It is a tough question, though, isn't it?

B. It is a very tough question, but again I have to talk from the perspective -- from the person that I am -- I am a college professor, I deal in ideas and I feel repelled by human irrationality and human cruelty, and I cannot accept it personally even when I see it as an inevitable consequence of -- you know -- past cruelty, etc., but I have to also add that I have to ~~miss~~ step back and look at this and look at my own feelings and say -- well, look, these are your feelings, you see -- if you were in control of the world, this is the way you would run it, but you are not in control of the world -- I personally would not write any memorandum saying that people's heads ought to get broken in order to galvanize or mobilize the feelings about the Civil Rights issue, because I don't believe in people's heads

being broken. I don't believe in stagnation, either.

A. You are over the barrel when you say that the inspired madman who breaks heads or cuts throats --

B. He is not I, though -- He is not I, I am not he--

A. But we can't be outside of history, we accept history by $\$$ - - -

B. That is right, therefore I look at history and I look at it and I -- some aspects of it, I deplore -- I can deplore some of it which I see, for example -- the Civil War -- it is horrible that people were killed, you know, but apparently slavery wasn't going to be dealt with, unless people were killed --

A. That is an open question, we can't take that one.

B. Alright -- World War II, I think it was incomprehensible the number of lives that were lost in there, but also apparently if those lives had not been lost, there might still be bigger and better concentration camps -- death camps, etc., you see - -

A. Did America enter the war to save the Jews or to avenge this terrible liquidation of the Jews in Germany -- how much did that have to do with our entering the war?

B. I don't know why America entered the war, but I know as a result of America's entering the war and as a result of Hitler being ~~arrogant~~ arrogant or stupid or blind enough to engage in a two-front war --

A. And the dumb Japs - -

B. Yes -- the concentration camps, the death camps were terminated -- McArthur had an opportunity to try to institute certain kinds of social reforms in Japan, which seemed better -- more better than worse, and I don't think that any of these things would have happened if America had not entered the war, or if the Germans and Japanese had won the war, you see -- and I am a Pacifist -- but I also have to be a realist

and say -- well, look, I can be a Pacifist all I want but my guts would be eaten up if I had to live in a world where people were being fed to gas chambers because somebody didn't like their religion or their color.

A. Is there any solution for this bit between saying -- I don't want to strike the memorandum for getting their heads broken, but yet I think it is a good idea to have some heads broken in order to get this revenge?

B. No, I do not think it is a good idea to have some heads broken in order to get some involvement, and I don't think we can get to -- I don't think that the planes are going to take off, either -- No, I don't think that it is a good idea to have any heads broken on purpose, I think, and let me see if I can make it perfectly clear -- In the world as it is now, it is tragic that the only way that human beings seem to be prepared to look at problems of justice and injustice, cruelty or inhumanity, is where these are intensified. This to me is the horrible thing.

A. We are all the beneficiaries of violence, aren't we?

B. Isn't this horrible? Well, this is what I am saying -- it is horrible that irrational, vile and cruel, horrible things have to be done in order to ^{prepare} ~~make~~ the way for the possibility of a little bit of change or justice.

A. Alice said "Liberty is won by inches" --

B. Yes, and the costs stand high. I suggested, you know, once in a paper that I wrote, that maybe colleges and universities should give courses in irrationality and demagogary because apparently these--

A. They do -- they are called history courses.

B. Alright -- I think they should give practical courses in them-- you know --

A. Those are called sociology courses --

B. Alright -- These are the things which apparently change.

A. You know, your time is up -- you said you wanted to - - -

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