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If no reply, or answer me,  
print this letter

February 24, 1964

Dear Mr Evers:

I have just finished playing back your tapes, and I want to say again how interesting, thoughtful, and valuable they are. Tomorrow they go to be transcribed, and I shall certainly send you a copy of the transcript, and a tape drawn from the original, for your files.

Meanwhile, in preparing my background notes for the interview, I have been reading the report ( in the Nashville Banner), of your address on the evening of February 17, at the Freedom Fund Dinner, at the Andrew Jackson Hotel. The address, as reported, raises certain questions for my presentation of the interview with you. The main one involves the matter of violence and non-violence, of course. On the tape you say:

- (1) "every legal means possible" for your ends.
- (2) "neither of us [you and your brother] ever advocated violence"
- (3) "bloodshed has never solved anything"
- (4) "Birmingham was a disaster " because of violence and the destruction of possible lines of communication"

If I print the interview without reference to your views as expressed in the Banner, and elsewhere, I lay myself open to slovenliness of treatment of this extremely important question. Yet I do not want to report simply from the Banner such things as:

- (1) "if a white man shoots at a Negro in Mississippi we will shoot back."
- (2) "If they bomb a <sup>Negro</sup> church and kill our children, we are going to bomb a white church and kill some of their children."

It would seem very important to let people know as exactly as possible what is involved in the contrast here.

- (1) Has something happened in Mississippi since our interview on February 12 to make you change your views? Or had a process of thinking finally eventuated in your statements of February 17 in Nashville?

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(2) You are aware, no doubt, of a certain amount of criticism of you among some people in Jackson -- Negroes -- for your attempt to pacify and disperse the students of Jackson College; for your attempt to prevent the growth of a "tactical crisis." Is your view in Nashville a response to such criticism?

(3) If the Banner has reported you correctly ( and if it has not I can assure you that I am a fellow sufferer in the affair of newspaper distortions ), how does your line square with the official NAACP attitude?

(4) Is the Banner correct in reporting your advocacy of non-selective reprisal -- say the killing of children or almost certainly innocent whites as an act of vengeance? Isn't there some difference between such non-selective reprisal and a form of reprisal that would be directed at people in responsible positions in the "power structure." If there is a difference between these two forms of reprisal, which would be more effective? Does your Nashville speech indicate that you hold that non-selective reprisal is more effective? In short range or long range?

This whole question is, as you yourself have said, of extreme importance, and your views on it must be of extreme importance. Your position is a difficult and dramatic one and commands attention. I don't want to nag at you about this, and I am certainly not interested in pointing out discrepancies merely as discrepancies. But I do want to make a fair and full presentation of your feelings and views and of whatever process has led you to change them -- if you have changed them.

I shall be very grateful for your answer to this letter. I know, from the conversation we had for the tape, that it will be sincere and seriously pondered. I want to thank you again for the time you gave me, against difficulties, in Jackson; and to thank you, in advance, for your reply to this letter.

Cordially yours,

Robert Penn Warren