

R.P.WARREN: This is Tape #2 of conversation with Mr. Roy Wilkins - proceed. You were speaking a moment ago when we were changing the tape of the matter of confidence in young Negroes or old Negroes in a sense that their history has helped build this confidence.

Mr. WILKINS: Yes, indeed it has. Those who have taken the trouble to read their history have found the struggle was going on before the 1960's, before the second world war in 1942, and before the first world war, and back even in slavery days the struggle was going on.

RPW: Let me ask this question in that connection. What accounts for the timing, then, of the so-called Negro revolution the last few years, with this impulse, as you say, existing over a long period of time. What brings it into the open now in a general effective way - highly organized way?

RW: This is the result of an accumulation of events - an accumulation of developments. I think first of all we had the emotional stimulus of the one hundred years since the Emancipation Proclamation - in 1963, you see - an emotional year - a centennial - an anniversary. They looked around them and they said, it's been a hundred years and look where we are. We aren't here and we aren't there and we aren't there and we aren't there. This gave a lot of impetus. Secondly we have to reckon I think with the fact that it took a number of years to build up an educated cadre of youngsters, fathers and grandfathers who cumulatively built resistance and resentment against things they suffered. This couldn't help but

explode. After - you graduate a hundred high school graduates this year, you graduate a thousand five years from now, you graduate ten thousand, you graduate twenty-five thousand - you keep on graduating - and finally you get to the place where that number of graduates will say, well, this is untenable, I can't stand it - we must push. That was one factor. Mr. Warren, you had migrations from the South to the North beginning with World War I, a large number of Negroes came up to Gary and Youngstown and Akron - industrial centers, and they settled down, they became voters and went to school and they sent their children to school. More importantly, about 1930 they became political factors in the Metchkey - in the Republican machine in Cleveland, in the Big Bill Thompson Republican machine in Chicago, in the Pendergast machine in - Democratic, in Kansas City - RFW: And the Krump one in Memphis, Tennessee.

RW: And the Krump one in Tennessee, and the Vair machine in Pennsylvania - Republican machine. And Tammany was nibbling and playing with the idea of the Negro - so that he became a political factor. This was a buildup too. All of this was a buildup to the 1960 's. But then you have Great Britain - you had two world wars too - you had a war against - to save the world for democracy, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, and the Negroes came from the swamps and the plantations and the cotton fields and they went overseas and they saw Paris, and they saw Berlin, and they saw Europe, they saw London, and they came back and they know there was a world outside of their particular county and there were a different kind of white people there and

different things were under way. And in World War II you had them fighting against the Master Race theory, and they could go back to Terree County, Georgia, and find a Master Race theory too. And this was not lost upon them. And finally, in 1960 you had the pile-up from the 1954 school decision, the defiance of it, the refusal to obey it, the attack upon the Supreme Court, the attempt to change the rules after the game had been won. The Negro thought he had won in 1954 - his citizenship had been reaffirmed, his constitutional basis of his life had been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court and said we can't discriminate on account of race - but discrimination went on, the Southern legislatures passed laws and they obstructed this, that and the other. Finally, in the 1960's the Negro broke loose and took direct action. He said, we can't depend on legislatures and we go to the courts and we take fifty years to go slowly through the courts and chip away at the separate but equal, and we win in 1954 but we don't win. So let's get out on the streets and take it directly to the seat of government, and that's what happened. And I believe that's the reason you have the revolt in the 1960's and not in the 1950's.

RFW: I don't imagine it would be surprising to you if I should say that a good many Negroes flinch from your explanation - I don't know how many, but some that I know, because it implies over a period of time a process, you see - the grandfather, the father, and the son, being the cadre of educated people with a will directed toward immediate achievement. This seems to say process always means the

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 4

gradual and therefore it affects the present, you see - let's say process, as one young man, a student, said to me in this connection, he said, I understand that a change takes place in time, you see, and that there's no absolute solution, no immediate solution to any social problem, but, he suddenly said, but damnit I can't bring myself to say it. That is, emotional as opposed to the intellectual grasp of the process.

RW: Yes, that's true. And I sympathize with that young man absolutely. I know exactly how he feels. But nevertheless, the fact remains that except in certain instances, certain situations, no immediate change can take place - a change in attitudes can be the - either induced or forced or brought about by persuasion, and these changes in attitude will in due time bring changes in fact.

RFW: And vice versa.

RW: Yes. I feel - I know that the Negro shrinks from the use of this word gradualism, or even the concept of gradualism.

RFW: Process is a bad word now.

RW: Yes. He just doesn't like that at all. And yet, if he reads history even in this country, he reads the history only of the labor movement, if he read just the history of the struggle for a child labor law, one segment of the labor movement, if he read the story of the struggle of the labor unions to get rid of the injunction, the use of the injunction against them - if he read all the labor struggles prior to the Norris-LaGuardia Act and the Wagner and the labor act, when labor really got its charter in the 1930's - the middle

1930's - he would understand that while you never, never, never give up or compromise, that things don't happen over night.

RPW: This is a question, then, of what freedom now means - what the slogan can mean - what is its content - it brings us to that, doesn't it?

RW: Yes, it does, and I think the answer is very - well, it's not very simple - nothing is simple - freedom now means just that. It means away with the old concepts, it means a beginning of real, solid, good faith beginning of new concepts. I think that young student you were talking to realizes that you don't change over night, but he wants Mississippi or Alabama or South Carolina or Louisiana to set its face in the direction of change and to make meaningful steps toward change that, carried out successively, can lead to what he wants. Now, he's very quick to detect - I am, and all Negroes are - very quick to detect these phony steps toward change, those pretensions, those delays, those take-it-or-leave-it, or those teaspoonfuls that they give you here and there, instead of giving you the whole pot of soup. Negroes have no truck with this sort of thing in this kind of revolution.

RPW: Let's take the word "revolution" for a moment. In what sense is the - well, the revolution a revolution - we're fooling with a word now, but behind the word what is the reality. How does this correspond to - how far does it correspond - the French Revolution or the American Revolution?

RW: I don't believe it corresponds to those, because we are not here

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 6

seeking to overthrow a government or to set up a new government. We are here trying to get the government, as expressed by a majority of the people, to get the government to put into practice its declared objectives. This is a little different kind of a revolution, it seems to me. We are also not in a revolution, as has been said over and over again - not a revolution of despair but a revolution of rising expectations. In other words, the Negro wants in, he wants to share in the American life. His outpouring in Washington on August 28, 1963, was an outpouring saying let me into the good things of American life - stop denying me. It was not a revolution - it was not an outpouring which said, let's get rid of this government and put in a new government that will give me a chance.

RW: Not to liquidate a regime, but to join a regime.

RW: Exactly so - exactly.

RW: There's another aspect - another problem - that might mean the difference between other revolutions - revolutions live on hope and they live on hate - the hope for the change, the expectation of change - otherwise a servile revolt or desperate insurrection - but a real revolution lives on a hope - a hope of accomplishment. Otherwise it can't organize itself. It also lives on this mobilizing of the force through hate. It's the guillotine has to operate - the revolutions of the past - you have to hate somebody. The question now is how the - the hopes are clear in this movement - how the hate side, the drive toward this squirt of adrenalin that makes it possible to act - how that is provoked, channelized and contained

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 7

if the movement looks toward a joining - its joining with, in one sense, quotes, the enemy. Is there some problem around this side of the matter? Now, it's easy if you look at Malcolm X - it's easy there, with the Black Muslims - and it's easy when you can take an extreme situation going the other way, and take a Quaker, you see, or - it's easy - extremely simple - it answers itself - now in the great world, the great body of people, with Negroes in between these two extreme positions - the problem emerges in one way or another, doesn't it?

RW: Yes - yes - I guess so. I don't envisage the Negro employing hate as a tactic, as a recognized procedure to mobilize support for his side or to win objectives for his side. I of course do not rule out the fact that here and there individually, as between two individuals or in a small group, there might be something akin to hate as a motivation for action.

RPW: I think we'd have to face that fact, then, that it's a component of human nature and human There are plenty of provocations.

RW: Exactly - exactly - yes. But I don't see the Negro in this country adopting hatred as a tactic. In the first place, if he had believed in hatred as a tool, and if he had been on - to a widespread degree subject to hatred or capable of employing it, maintaining it and feeding it and using it, he would have done so long ago. He - I once said about Malcolm X - he was talking about rifle clubs in 1964 - and violence and shedding blood - if the Negro had

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 8

believed in that he would have used it a long time ago when he was much worse off than he is now.

RPW: Of course once, we believe in
the nonviolent approach as a matter of philosophy and ethics. Also,
he said with his infectious grin, my folks had more guns.

RW: Yes, that's true, and the Negro has never forgotten the fact. As a matter of fact, the Negro in this country is a very practical and pragmatic animal, and he has never lost sight of the elementary facts of survival, and he never has forgotten that he's a ten percent minority numerically, and that economically and politically he is a much greater minority than ten percent. So that he does not have the power, except the moral power, to mobilize - how many guns, to put it bluntly - how many guns can he get?

RPW: But, shall we say, that any movement is always a movement of power. It's a question of the nature of power - is that it then?

RW: Yes. And he has on his side, and he has utilized I think magnificently, the moral power that he has. He has the power of moral righteousness on his side, and he has something else. The United States is vulnerable because of its declared purposes. Now, if it had an ambiguous constitution, or if it had an ambiguous declaration of independence, this would be different. But the Declaration of Independence says all men - now, there were some squabbles over the Constitution, of course - there were some people there who didn't want it to mean what we now say it means. But this was resolved in the usual way. There are a lot of people now who don't believe in

liquor control, let's say, or fair price laws, or import duties on watches, - on hides, yes, say. The Tanners want duties on hides. The watch people don't much care whether they have duties on hides or not, and so forth and so on. Well, we resolved this question in our Constitution. But America is on record the haven of all the oppressed peoples of the world. This is the land where you can come and demonstrate your ability and achieve on the basis of your ability. If you're a Hungarian when you get here you become an American, and if you're an Irishman when you get here you become an American.

RFW: What do you think ^{of} the notion that some sociologists or historians have enunciated that the American Negro is more like ~~the~~ old American than like any other element in our culture?

RW: Some people have said that, and it's -

RW: The old Yankee or the old Southerner -

RW: - it's probably true - it's probably true - he is -

RFW: He's an old American too.

RW: Yes, he is, he's a very old American, and he's American in his concepts. He's - I think he's liberal only on the race question. - I mean, I think he's a conservative economically, I think he wants to hold on to gains in property and protection. I may be wrong, but I don't see him as a bold experimenter in political science or social reform. He may change once he gets on a period of equality. I think of course he'll have his proportion of these people, as he now has. There are Negroes who are nonconformists, there are Negroes who are Atheists, there are Negroes who are even DeGaullists -

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 10

RPW: How much anti-Semitism do you think actually exists among Negroes?

RW: That's a hard question.

RPW: I remember the Philadelphia episode and other episodes of the sort.

RW: Well, I find that -

RPW: I have encountered it myself.

RW: Yes. Basically, Negroes are not anti-Semitic, and such anti-Semitism as he occasionally expresses stems from his own personal experience, like a white man who tells you that Negroes are no good. I knew one once and he did so-and-so to me, or he wouldn't do so-and-so. And Negroes who make anti-Semitic remarks are those who may have run into, say, a Jewish storekeeper or a Jewish landlord or a Jewish woman who is the boss of domestic servants - these are the three areas in which they come into contact with Jewish families - with Jewish people generally - the landlord, the storekeeper, and the lady of the house where they work. If they have an unfortunate experience with a Jewish housewife, let's say, they are likely, as most weak people are, this Jewish lady did so-and-so. Well, if they work for an Irish woman or a German woman or a Swedish woman and she did precisely the same thing the Jewish woman did or had the same attitude, they would say, oh, that old white woman - you see.

RPW: Yes. In other words, they have taken on some coloration of attitude from the floating Gentile white prejudices.

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 11

RW: Yes, they have - they have also. But they have never forgotten, for example - I have traveled all over this country - I've met thousands upon thousands of Negroes, and have lived in their areas and I know them - they have never forgotten that wherever they have been, whatever kind of trouble they've been in, the Jews have helped them - some Jews - either Jewish individuals or Jewish philanthropists or Jewish rabbis. Invariably, when you go into a town and you ask the Negro community, who do you count among your friends in the white community? among the first five people always a Jewish rabbi - always. He's the man who understands their problem and sympathizes with them, who speaks to their meetings, who talks to them. So that anti-Semitism among them I feel is not virulent and not hateful, although, like any kind of racial feeling, it is detestable. But it's not the kind of hate-the-Jew attitude that you find in some people.

RPW: You don't think that they exploit it, by, say, a Black Nationalist movement? Is there a serious problem that way or not?

RW: It has been - an attempt - I don't think so. Now, the Muslims have attempted - they have used anti-Semitism. But I don't believe they have gotten far. They have mouthed a few catchwords, and those catchwords have been taken up by their followers. But I don't believe that it has become part and parcel of the Negro community. In fact, I am positive it has not. It just hasn't taken hold. Now there--even in the deep South you recognize that Jews have helped them, Jews have extended a hand, Jews have made loans to them, Jews have granted them credit, Jews have fought the battle against discrimi-

Rey Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 12

nation where they could - remember, Jews have been vulnerable in the South too. They have not been able at all times to speak out. But in this present civil rights crisis that has developed since the Supreme Court decision in 1954, the Jewish community overwhelmingly has been on what we call our side. Now, there are Jews who are not on our side, Jews who are opposed to us, and who have nothing to do with the civil rights movement.

RPW: As a Negro in the audience said, the country club Jews are against us. That's the way he put it.

RW : Yes. It's hard to classify them, but there are - any time you have four million people you have all kinds of beliefs, and there are plenty of Jews who don't want to be bothered with the Negro problem, don't want to be identified with it, they don't want the Jews - they don't want the Jews' problem tied to the Negro problem.

RPW: This flight from Jewishness to a degree sometimes, isn't it?

RW: Yes, but even the Jews - to go back to your question of some time ago, about Negroes discovering themselves - I think Jews have come to the place, again - again, where they - and they go periodically, they stray back and forth - but they have come in increasing numbers to Jewishness, to an appreciation of the Jewish worth, to pride in their own faith and religion and in their own accomplishments. I mean, aside from the genuine pride they have always had. But I think - I think the Jews have a feeling of their own that Jews amount to something and Jews are important, and maybe some of them say, as one of them told - a rabbi told me - my congregation told me

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 13

they didn't want me to preach on the Negro question because they didn't want Jews identified with the Negro question. This was a very high type Jewish congregation. Yet, on the other hand, the rabbi of one of the most aristocratic and wealthiest Jewish congregations in the United States appeared on the same program with me and, not because I was there or anything about it, outlined a speech that could have been made by the finest liberal in the United States. So you can't classify them. You can't say the country club Jew or the wealthy Jew.

RPW: A quotation from -

RW: I understand that - I understand that very well - yes.

RPW: You say liberal among the white friends of - you see. This raises a sort of question about the role of the white man in relation to the Negro movement or Negro revolution. On the one hand you will find such statements as the one made by Mr. Baldwin, the white liberal is an affliction, and Iseley's fond farewell to the white liberal, or there's the white man stay home, or Jack Greenberg - all of these - Yankee go home - . On the other hand, you will find them saying - well, go away entirely, leave us alone and we'll take the choice, we'll run the show. On the other hand, another attitude saying, if you come you ought to make yourself contemptible, as it were, in one form or another. You are coming, and a person who is - well, best put it this way - in Mississippi, for instance, Robert Moses - of the attitude of the Negroes there toward white helpers from the outside who want to over-identify. This

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 14

contempt of the white man's naivete - his innocence, his desire to enter, to buddy up, to be one. In other words, the white man can have - these two poles - has no role, you see - if he's - he says commonly expressed - in one form or another they appear all over the place - and can be associated with the Negro movement in one way or another. That is, the white man can find no role acceptable, you see, to the Negro, in so far as you take these pronouncements and put them all together - he has no place to come close, you see, to join, to affiliate, to help, he has - no attitude is acceptable

Do you see the problem?

RW: Yes, I see the problem. I'm familiar with it, and I disagree very greatly with the -

RPW: With both of these attitudes?

RW: Basically, yes. I disagree with it, although I understand why it exists in some cases. But I feel first of all that we ought to recognize that white people have been fighting for the liberty of the individual long before the Negro question of liberation ever came up.

RPW: This is a point of considerable importance, that is, the concept was and now it 's a question of application - particular application. Do you understand -

RW: Exactly, well - yes, that's right. White people, beginning with - long before the Magna Carta - were fighting against oppression and for the liberty of the individual, and they have fought, since we have had our country here, many battles not connected with race. They have

Roy Wilkins - Tape #2 - p. 15

fought for freedom of the press, and freedom of religion, and all the sorts of things that they have fought for. We ought to recognize that they have a heritage of protecting and enhancing the Constitution of the United States, irrespective of whether it applies to black people, white people, Northerners or Southerners, and that there can be sincere white people who believe in these principles and want to fight for them, and we ought not to shut them out of our movement because they don't fit into every niche and cranny of our thinking and our being, and they don't behave exactly as we feel they should behave as blood brothers - we're brothers after all in a cause - the cause of liberty.

RPW : That is, you are throwing the emphasis on the - if I understand you right - ^{son} on the/ceptual side of it.

RW: That's part of it. Now, I would come - as soon as we finish here - I would come to the other part about his feeling of - in wearing himself in and not being able to adjust, and - let's come to that.

RPW: All right, fine. This is the end of Tape #2 of the conversation with Mr. Roy Wilkins. Proceed on Tape #3.

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